

'Have you got anybody you can stay with?'

Housing options for young adults leaving custody



We change lives



give homeless
young people
a future

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Thanks to the young people and practitioners who took part in this research. Their words and stories can be heard throughout this report.

We would like to thank Elizabeth Daw for her support in designing this research project and conducting interviews.

We would also like to thank Helen Berresford, Balbir Chatrik, Pippa Goodfellow, David Watson and the Transition to Adulthood Alliance for their contributions. Thanks also go to those who shared the innovative interventions they have developed, highlighted throughout our report as good practice examples.

Executive summary

Safe and stable housing is a critical factor in reducing reoffending rates for young people leaving custody. It provides the foundations for a young person to rebuild their life and move forward into a positive future away from crime. However, many young custody leavers face severe challenges in accessing accommodation on release; a situation which can push them into homelessness, chaotic housing situations and reoffending.

Centrepoint and Nacro have conducted this research to examine the housing options and support in place for young people as they leave the prison system. The research is based on interviews with young custody leavers aged 18 to 25, and interviews with the practitioners who support them across a range of agencies. This research was carried out in late 2017, before the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA) and before the clarification from Government that all young people under 21 who have secured accommodation would be able to claim housing costs through Universal Credit.

Our analysis highlights three thematic requirements and associated barriers which we believe need to be addressed to enable young people to access safe and secure accommodation on release from custody. While we continue to call for a joined up, cross government Housing Strategy which meets the needs of vulnerable people, including young people that leave the criminal justice system each year, we have identified some practical solutions, that if adopted in the current system could make a real difference to young people leaving custody and experiencing barriers to accessing safe and stable housing.

a) Young people leaving custody need the right preparation:

- Young people leaving custody should have a resettlement plan to ensure that their housing needs are met and necessary services are in place prior to their release; however, many of the participants in the research reported that planning was insufficient and not done far enough ahead of their release to be effective.
- Disruptions such as transfers to different prisons during a sentence can hinder effective pre-release planning and mean that young people miss out on the engagement and support they need.
- Inconsistencies in joint working between prisons, community rehabilitation companies (CRC) and the National Probation Service (NPS) make it difficult to offer consistent pre- and post-release preparation and assistance. Practitioners also highlighted high workloads and insufficient resources as barriers to providing meaningful support.
- Young people in custody for short periods or recalled to custody may not have the opportunity to engage with housing and post-release planning, increasing the risk of poor housing outcomes and reoffending upon release.
- Home Detention Curfew (HDC) can ease the transition from custody, improve access to employment and training opportunities and assist resettlement in general. However, practitioners expressed concerns that some young people who would be eligible cannot access HDC because they do not have housing to go to or provide unsuitable home addresses.

b) Young people leaving custody need access to a safe and stable home with an ongoing support network:

- Too many young people experience homelessness after leaving custody. Across Centrepoint's accommodation, young custody leavers are almost twice as likely to have slept rough as those without experience with the prison system. This risks them turning to negative support networks and reoffending in order to secure a bed for the night.
- Historically some local housing authorities have not assessed young people until they have left custody, even though pre-release work with probation and rehabilitation services may begin months before. This means young people are only able to engage at a point of crisis, undermining efforts to prevent homelessness.
- Prior to the HRA some young custody leavers are seen as having made themselves 'intentionally homeless' by their local authority on the basis of having been convicted of a crime, and in general are not seen as being in priority need for homelessness assistance despite their vulnerability. The implementation of the HRA provides an opportunity to ensure this is no longer possible.
- While supported accommodation is often the most suitable option for young people leaving custody, proposed changes to funding may put services at risk, particularly those that support people without a statutory right to housing.



- The private rented sector is largely inaccessible for young custody leavers, with high upfront costs which are unaffordable for many prison leavers. Interviewees also highlighted landlords' reluctance to let to young people in general and especially young custody leavers.
- Returning to the family is often a young person's best accommodation option after leaving custody and the retention of family links throughout a sentence can decrease the chance of reoffending. However, this does not work for those young people who have come from an unstable family situation, and should not be assumed as the best option in every case.

c) Young people leaving custody need financial security:

- Making a claim for Universal Credit can be difficult while in custody, where access to the internet and Jobcentre Plus work coaches is limited and inconsistent and where young people may not have the documentation they need to complete an application. However, these barriers are leading to unacceptable delays in receiving essential financial support after release.
- Lower entitlements to benefits make it much more difficult for custody leavers to access appropriate housing they can afford. The Shared Accommodation Rate (SAR) drastically limits the accommodation available and can force custody leavers into shared housing which may not be appropriate for their needs.
- The discharge grant someone receives when leaving prison has remained at £46 for over 15 years. For young custody leavers trying to make a fresh start whilst looking for employment or waiting for benefits to be processed, this amount is not enough for them to get back on their feet.
- Finding and sustaining employment is key to securing accommodation and reducing reoffending. The research highlights some innovative and effective training programmes, building in wraparound support around employment, but found that provision is inconsistent across the wider prison and probation estate.
- Criminal records present a major barrier for young custody leavers looking to access employment, with both employers and applicants unsure what legally needs to be disclosed.

Recommendations

We are calling for a cross departmental approach to improve the housing options for young adults leaving custody.

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and the Ministry of Justice should work together to:

- Guarantee that deposits and rent for the first month for young adults leaving custody if going into private rented accommodation
- Ensure relevant learning from the Homelessness Trailblazers, including prison pre-release protocols, specific to young people leaving custody, is disseminated and embedded into local authority practice across England
- Fund programmes across all prisons to educate all young people leaving custody on tenancy management as part of preparation for release and provide mentors to help young people sustain tenancies on release as well as helping to allay landlord fear
- Co-invest in the development and supply of innovative housing models for young custody leavers, including through social investment
- Collate and publish national data on the number of young adults leaving custody and their housing needs and outcomes
- Ensure funding for supported housing is directly linked to a national housing needs assessments of young people leaving custody

The Ministry of Justice should:

- Increase the use of community sentences to replace short custodial sentences and consider the Scottish justice system approach against a presumption of custodial sentences of 3 months or less
- Work with the judiciary to understand the impact that a custodial sentence can have on a young person's housing situation and potential homelessness
- Ensure that alongside the funding and implementation of the Farmer Review recommendations, early family support is in place where identified as appropriate for a young person to return home including a focus on building and maintaining positive relationships while in custody and access to release on temporary licence (ROTL)
- Ensure that where use of Home Detention Curfew would be beneficial and appropriate to a young person, there is adequate supply of accommodation
- Commission a fundamental review and reform the overly complex criminal records regime
- Increase the discharge grant in line with inflation
- Provide a funding mechanism so that where young people have claimed an advance payment, it is not deducted from future Universal Credit payments

Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service should:

- Plan releases of young people so they are not released on a Friday and/or at a time of the day when they will not be able to present at a local housing authority or the Jobcentre Plus
- Amend Basic Custody Screening Tools to ensure that where the young person has identified they will return to family on discharge, specific questions focus on the suitability of this and flag a need for targeted support throughout custody

Local housing authorities should:

- Ensure that advice and information developed for custody leavers (as per the Homelessness Reduction Act) includes clear information about emergency financial support, such as hardship payments

Department for Work and Pensions should:

- Exempt all custody leavers under 25 from the shared accommodation rate of the local housing allowance to increase their ability to access a private rented tenancy
- Facilitate advance claims to Universal Credit for those preparing to leave custody, whether this is online or via a paper form, so that custody leavers can prepare their benefit claim prior to release and then submit it immediately upon release

Introduction

“Homelessness is one of the big causes of reoffending. I was meeting with someone yesterday who was saying that without having somewhere to live his only option is crime... he has to stay at friends’ houses rather than shop doors, and to stay at those friends’ houses he has to get involved in the crimes that they’re committing” – Reducing reoffending worker, charity

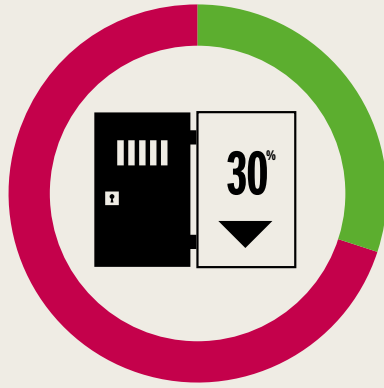
Accommodation for people leaving prison is key to promoting desistance.¹ In the context of a systemic housing crisis, young people in particular have few suitable accommodation options open to them, which can significantly hinder the process of moving on from custody and wider resettlement into the community. Our study aimed to provide a snapshot of the barriers that young people face when they are seeking safe and stable housing on release from custody. Considering these barriers alongside the wider policy context, we wanted to provide a renewed focus on this critical challenge and explore how we could collectively work together to provide practical solutions.

Centrepoint and Nacro deliver housing and support services to thousands of vulnerable young people and recognise the importance of giving a young person the right type of accommodation to support them to move forward with their life, including those leaving custody. The aim of this report is to provide practical recommendations to remove barriers to housing for this group.

What’s the current picture?

Since 2002, there has been a 30 per cent decrease in the number of young adults in custody.² Whilst this decrease is welcome, the reoffending rates for this group remain high. The number of young adults aged 18 to 24 given a custodial sentence was 12,254 as of September 2017,³ representing around 16 per cent of the whole prison population. Nearly a third of all 18 to 24 year olds in custody will reoffend, with an average number of three re-offences per person.⁴ In London, the reoffending rate rises to 42 per cent for young adults leaving custody within three months.⁵ The average cost of keeping someone in prison is around £35,000 a year per prisoner.⁶ There is very little national data available on the number of young adults leaving custody without accommodation, however it has been stated that around 30 per cent of all adult custody leavers leave prison without accommodation.⁷

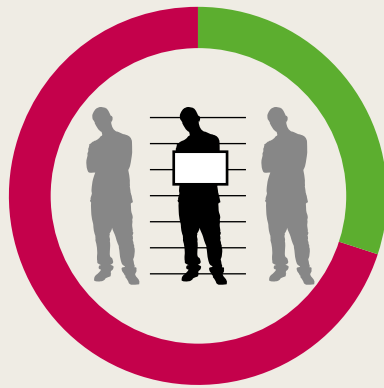
For young adults, the transition from custody to community occurs as they are also transitioning to adulthood. Evidence highlights the plethora of barriers stacked against young people as they start to turn their lives around and the need for support during this challenging period.⁸ It is therefore vital that the right preparatory work is done in custody as early as possible to ensure that young people are given the best possible chance of creating a sustainable future away from crime.



There has been a **30 per cent** decrease in the number of young adults in custody since 2002



Young adults make up **16 per cent** of the whole prison population



Over a third of young adults who leave custody reoffend within three months.



In London, **42 per cent** of young adults leaving custody reoffend within three months.



Each prison place costs **£35,000** each year

The policy and practice context: young adults, justice and housing

Our focus on young adults

Up to the age of 18, young people in the criminal justice system are overseen by a distinct justice system. From the age of 18, while there is flexibility to continue some of the support attributed to under 18s, most are overseen by the adult estate. However, there is a growing body of evidence which suggests that the brain is not developed or mature in certain parts until the early to mid twenties.⁹ These are parts of the brain that control impulse and interpret emotions as well as the capacity for moral reasoning, all heavily linked to criminal justice behaviours. Furthermore, transitioning to adulthood can often be a difficult time; family relationships, leaving home as well as school mean young people often require a heightened level of support as they are most at risk of social exclusion.¹⁰ For this reason, extensive work has taken place over the last two decades to evidence that an adult response is not necessarily the right one for 18 to 25 year olds in the criminal justice system as it does not acknowledge the specific vulnerabilities and appropriate responses for this age group.

Research shows that there are disproportionate numbers of care leavers in the criminal justice system - around a quarter of the adult prison population have been in care.¹¹ Without an advocate to ensure care leavers understand their entitlement to support, many are at risk of leaving custody without the support they need.

In 2016, following an extensive inquiry, the Justice Select Committee laid out a comprehensive set of recommendations to government to embed a strategic approach to young adults in the criminal justice system, including legislative change to recognise developmental maturity in sentencing frameworks. As part of its overall response to this enquiry, the government stated 'because the relevance of maturity is already becoming increasingly central to policy and practice, we do not accept the argument that developmental status needs to be recognised in legislation.'¹²

In custody, there has been some progression in recognising maturity. The Ministry of Justice has started to roll out a maturity screening tool, which categorises men aged 18 to 25 into groups distinguished by high or low levels of psychosocial maturity.¹³ It is intended to profile local young adult populations, highlighting how many people under their care are likely to require services or interventions to promote maturation.

With regards to resettlement in the community, the Transition to Adulthood Alliance highlighted the need for commissioners and the multiple agencies working with this group to adopt a distinct approach in providing resettlement support.¹⁴ Since the implementation of a new probation system - Transforming Rehabilitation (TR) - some probation providers (Community Rehabilitation Companies) have adopted specific approaches to this group.

A Memorandum of Understanding published by the Mayor of London in April 2018, in conjunction with the Ministry of Justice and London Councils referenced the need for a new approach to working with young adults in the criminal justice system in London, acknowledging the fact that outcomes for this group are amongst the worst; similarly the housing challenges faced in London are amongst the most severe in England and Wales.¹⁵ This devolution document lays out a promising whole system approach across agencies, specifically in the recognition that young adults are a distinct group with distinct resettlement challenges.

The justice system in 2018

The problems in the prison system in England are well documented and while there was a 3 per cent decrease in the prison population from March 2017 to March 2018¹⁶, the population is predicted to rise to 88,000 by 2022.¹⁷ Assaults in prison reached a record high of 26,643 incidents in the 12 months to March 2017, up 4,461 (20 per cent) from the previous year.¹⁸ A Prisons and Courts Bill was introduced in early 2017 but withdrawn following the general election in July 2017; which included provision to improve prison safety and enable governors to take more control and accountability for outcomes linked to employment and health. Conditions in custody can have a direct and significant impact on resettlement in the community, for example the lack of purposeful activity and an inability to access key staff to start the resettlement journey well before release. A whole system approach across custody and the community is needed to improve the outcomes for people moving through the criminal justice system.

Transforming Rehabilitation, a Ministry of Justice initiative established in 2014, was intended to change the way probation services worked and reduce reoffending by establishing 21 Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRCs) working with low and medium risk offenders on a payment by results basis, in place of previous Probation Trusts and working alongside the National Probation Service (NPS) which manages high risk offenders. The original vision was to ensure prisoners had access to seamless provision from a single provider (the CRC) prior to release continuing while they resettled in the community. Through this provision, the individual should be given support to prepare for release, reduce the risk of reoffending and then continue to support them as they resettle. This would include preparing a resettlement plan, helping prisoners to find accommodation, helping with finance and benefits, and support to find employment.¹⁹ Almost four years on, major operational issues continue to hamper delivery. These major changes, which intended to bring down reoffending rates, have failed to do so at the rate anticipated and failed to deliver the original objectives. Contract renewals in 2021 for CRCs offer a chance to revisit how to improve outcomes for individuals going through resettlement services. A Justice Select Committee inquiry on TR launched in October 2017 provides an important opportunity to recommend immediate changes which could unblock many of these operational challenges.

In the context of prison overcrowding and severe staff shortages, finding viable alternatives to custody is critical. In the year 2016-17, 2,322 18 to 20 year olds were given a custodial sentence of six months or less.²⁰ A short custodial sentence can cause a huge amount of disruption to a young person's life and often impact upon housing, relationships and employment stability. Changes brought in under the Offender Rehabilitation Act 2014 mean that anyone serving a custodial sentence of two days or more is required to serve a minimum of 12 months of supervision in the community. Breaching any conditions, including conditions around where that young person is staying, means a person can be recalled to custody – over 10,000 people serving a sentence of less than 12 months were recalled back to custody in the July 2016 to July 2017.²¹

The importance of a home

Having a safe and secure home is crucial to building a positive future away from crime, both psychologically and physically. It provides a sense of positive identity and security that is critical in helping someone to build a crime free future, as well as being fundamental in enabling someone to access structural elements such as employment and training as well as registering with a GP and accessing other health services.

Nacro's Beyond Youth Custody partnership programme explored what effective resettlement looks like for young people leaving custody; including the importance of providing both structural and personal support in a way that is tailored to the needs of that young person; enabling desistance from crime through a shift in identity:

'Effective and sustained resettlement involves the young person shifting their identity away from one that is conducive to offending to one that promotes a crime-free life and social inclusion. Such a change in the way that young people view themselves, and their future life chances, is central to the rehabilitative process.'²²

Over 15 years ago the Social Exclusion Unit cited housing as central to reducing recidivism, which led to housing being named as one of the seven pathways to reducing reoffending.²³ However, the reality in 2018 is bleak. The 2017 Independent Monitoring Board annual report of HMP Thameside found that almost half of prisoners surveyed reported that 'they would soon reoffend in order to be returned to the relative security of prison: and they do.'²⁴ The report found that providers were proactively supporting prisoners with housing options before release, but many of the referrals were of little value as there was no housing available. Government figures suggest that around 30 per cent of the overall prison population leave custody homeless, but this does not include the numbers that are 'hidden homeless', for example those sofa surfing or going back to a negative family environment.²⁵

Housing and homelessness is high on the political agenda, particularly with the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act. The Act brings in a number of new measures which should improve support for those leaving custody. Local housing authorities must now:

- take reasonable steps to help prevent any eligible person who is at risk of homelessness from becoming homeless, up to 56 days before they are likely to become homeless

- design advice and information to meet the needs of people in their area, in particular vulnerable groups including those released from prison
- develop links with local agencies who have a new duty to refer (this includes prisons)

If homelessness is not prevented, the local authority will only owe the main housing duty to applicants who are eligible and in priority need. This includes pregnant women, families with children and young care leavers. Other groups may be assessed as having priority need because they are vulnerable to homelessness including as a result of being in prison. At the time of writing, it is still unknown exactly how the Homelessness Reduction Act will support custody leavers and how consistent this will be.

In April 2018, the government reversed a policy that removed an automatic entitlement to the housing cost element of Universal Credit for 18-21 year olds. Although prison leavers were exempt from this, it removes a layer of complexity and bureaucracy for practitioners and is a welcome move. Within the current policy landscape, there are strong opportunities to increase the support available to young people leaving custody to give them the best possible chance of moving on from custody successfully into a safe and secure home and bringing down stubbornly high reoffending rates.

Methodology

The aim of this report was to explore the experiences of young adults aged 18 to 25 as they leave custody and source accommodation. We sought to understand the barriers which prevent young custody leavers from finding a safe and secure place to live.

Interviews with young custody leavers

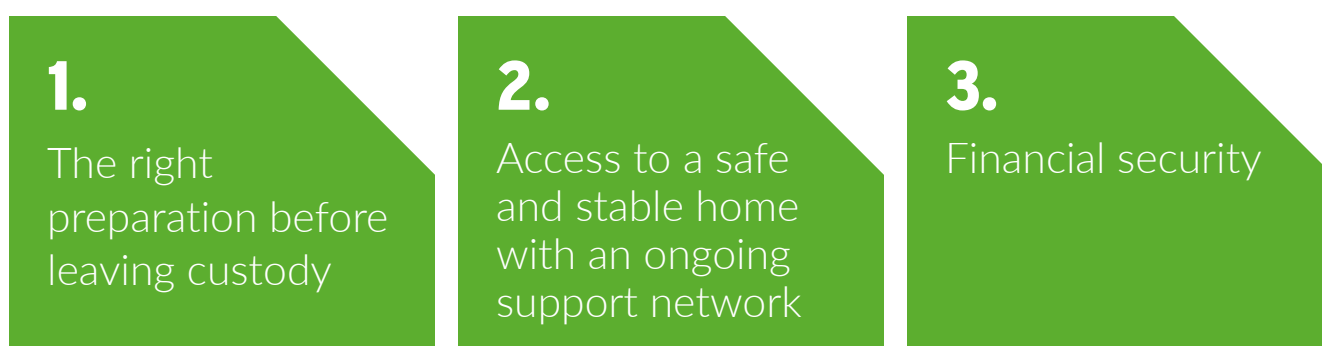
Between November 2017 and February 2018 we interviewed seven custody leavers aged 18 to 25. The semi structured interviews were done either in person or via telephone. The young people who participated in the research were recruited via youth homelessness organisations. Despite our best efforts, we were unable to interview any female young custody leavers however we tried to capture the experience of young women through interviews with professionals.

Interviews with practitioners supporting young custody leavers

Between November 2017 and February 2018 we interviewed 15 professionals from a range of organisations supporting young custody leavers. These ranged from professionals working in probation, CRCs, prisons, charities and local authorities. Interviews were semi-structured and conducted by phone or in person. They provided crucial insight into systemic issues affecting young people, which they themselves may not have identified during their interviews.

We also carried out desk based research, as well as using data from our own services, to gain a broader understanding of the range of challenges practitioners and young people face.

The research findings are structured around three thematic requirements which we believe are key to reducing reoffending and enabling young people to access safe and secure accommodation. Young people leaving custody need:



Young people leaving custody need the right preparation

Young people leaving custody do not always have a clear plan for their resettlement journey or access to tools that would enable a seamless transition into the community.

When a young person is in court, a risk assessment will usually take place by NPS staff who will allocate the case to themselves if the young person is high risk or the CRC if the young person is assessed as low or medium risk. Within the first two weeks of being in custody, a Basic Screening Custody Tool will flag accommodation as a resettlement need.

If assessed as high risk, the young person will be supervised by the NPS. Depending on the licence conditions, that young person may be required to move to Approved Premises and as such their short term accommodation, usually up to three months, will be organised in relation to this. Approved Premises accommodation can range from a house of mixed occupation (HMO) to hostels made up of single and shared rooms. This report predominantly focuses on the experiences of young people and practitioners working with CRCs and where accommodation is not part of a licence condition.

Young people leaving custody should have a resettlement plan, to ensure that the necessary services are put in place ahead of release. Guidance promotes effective sentence planning and sets out the expectations for staff, whether undertaken by the NPS or a CRC.²⁶ For those serving more than 12 weeks, the resettlement plan for that young person should be revisited three months prior to release to review the original plan, to assess whether resettlement needs have changed and identify where work should be done throughout this pre-release period. Sourcing appropriate housing for that young person should form a key part of this. For some of the young people we spoke to, planning was insufficient and not done far enough in advance of release.

“About a week before my release, someone from probation came in to talk to me, for the first time in four and a half years” – Aaron

The young person should be the central, active participant in their resettlement planning. Beyond Youth Custody research shows that co-creation and engagement is key to effective resettlement planning, meaning the young person has a stake in their own future.²⁷ It is crucial that the plan is customised and constructive, centred on building a positive identity and future. One young person explained how even when they did receive information to help them plan for release, it was too short notice:

“They told me I was going to Approved Premises but there was a shortage of beds. This was a week before my release. About two days before my release, my mentor had been chasing it up; he came and told me that they had found me a bed. They didn't bother telling me anything or where it was” – Cam

While practitioners should begin conversations with individuals about their housing options three months prior to release, disruptions often occur, for example being transferred to a different prison during that three-month period.

One young person was transferred to an HMIRC detention centre which took him away from the worker who was supporting him to find accommodation. After six days in the detention centre, he was released with a train ticket back to the area where he had originally lived but received no further support to find accommodation. He had to rely on a former foster carer for help. One practitioner who receives referrals from probation and CRCs in order to support young people into accommodation echoed these frustrations:

“They might be transferred within those 12 weeks and it might be that their assessment wasn’t completed at their previous prison. We’ve had guys referred to us with two or three days left before release” – Rehabilitation worker, charity

Where there is comprehensive guidance for practitioners working with young adults to source accommodation²⁸ wider structural issues within the prison system mean that it can still be challenging for practitioners to source the right type of accommodation. Experiences of providers of TR reference the lack of join up and complex and bureaucratic IT systems and infrastructures between prisons, CRCs and NPS, with resettlement staff often juggling high caseloads with poor information and data.²⁹ Practitioners must take a coordinated, consistent and customised approach to planning for a young person’s resettlement to maximise the best possible outcomes for that young person.³⁰

Good practice example:

Switchback

Switchback is a London based rehabilitation charity which uses an intensive through-the-gate mentoring model supporting prisoners (trainees) aged 18-30 across all areas of their lives, along the following resettlement pathways:

- accommodation
- employability
- education and training
- relationships and family
- finance
- interaction with the criminal justice system
- attitudes and behaviour
- independent living skills
- drugs and alcohol
- mental and physical health

Each mentor regularly meets with their trainee during the last three months before release, where they plan for life after. The same mentor then meets him on release, supporting him through work-based training with one of their partner employers, as well as the other aspects of his life, including accommodation and family relationships. The aim at Switchback is to support each trainee towards stability and taking control of his life and part of this is accessing sustainable employment.

Data collected by Switchback shows that:

- On release, 67 per cent of trainees since 2015 returned to family and 17 per cent to a hostel or supported housing.
- 80 per cent of Switchback trainees were assessed as ‘unstable’ in the area of housing at their point of release, however finances, drug/alcohol issues and relationships are the most common areas of instability.
- Of those that completed the programme, 91 per cent of trainees achieved housing stability and 81 per cent achieved financial stability.

The Switchback programme demonstrates the importance of the wraparound support that is needed across multiple pathways and based on the individual - including housing. While the right type of accommodation is absolutely crucial, stability across other pathways needs to be achieved in parallel in order to achieve real, lasting change after prison. This broad approach means that individuals have enough resilience and stability across their life that when faced with instability in one area (such as sudden loss of housing), they are better able to manage that setback and keep moving towards positive change.

Short sentences make it difficult to undertake meaningful support work

The practitioners we interviewed explained that it is particularly difficult to plan for release when a young person has a short sentence, as there is little time for meaningful work to be done. Due to this, young people on short sentences are particularly at risk of poor housing outcomes and reoffending. They may be in custody long enough

to lose a tenancy or family relationships may be damaged, but may not be in custody long enough to engage with more comprehensive levels of support or programmes.

“Generally it’d be a 12 week sentence, but you’re out in six. People can be recalled for 14 days and are out then they reoffend or something happens. 14 days there’s no time on our end to do anything. Nothing can be done because of the lack of resources. So they’re in and out, in and out and that’s until they’re committed for something bigger. So it’s very difficult to have an intervention in that space of time”

– Reducing Reoffending worker, charity

Good practice example:

Reducing reoffending for those on short sentence

The Cheshire and Greater Manchester CRC developed the Intensive Community Order (ICO) for men aged 18 to 25 who have committed an offence which carries a prison term of less than 12 months. The aim is to reduce the ‘revolving door’ problem associated with individuals who complete short-term prison sentences.

The model harnesses the strengths of ICO staff who are trained specially in young adult practice and research, with a strong focus on stabilisation and exploration of the psychological factors that contribute to offending. Young people undertake a learning disability and difficulty screening and a maturity assessment to induct them into the programme and ensure their individual needs are met. The young people then undergo a programme of work around identity, adulthood and maturity; identify a pathway into education, training or employment; and enhanced sessions of victim work. Every young person is offered a record of their achievements, will be assessed for community mentor support and have a bespoke ICO exit plan.

The ICO is having an impact. The reconviction rate is 22 per cent, nearly a third less than the wider north west 18-24 year old male population. 21 per cent of young people are also in employment by the end of their order. Based on Outcomes Star data, 62 per cent of young people made positive progress in managing a tenancy and accommodation.

Community sentences provide an alternative where young people undertake an effective intervention but do not experience the disruption and trauma of custody. Effective community sentences mean the critical foundations of their life, including housing, family and relationships, are not disrupted. A custodial sentence moves them further away from these foundations. A survey of magistrates has, however, shown a significant lack of confidence in using community sentences, as they are not seen as visible or enforced.³¹

There have been calls from organisations to establish formal sentencing principles for young adults to take into account maturity and development.³² This should include the impact that loss of housing can have on the ability for young people to effectively rebuild their lives once they leave custody. A more individualised approach should be taken with this group of young people when it comes to sentencing to ensure they receive the best support and security to build a positive future.

The Ministry of Justice should increase the use of community sentences to replace custodial sentences and consider the Scottish justice system approach against a presumption of custodial sentences of 6 months or less.

The Ministry of Justice should work with the judiciary to understand the impact that a custodial sentence can have on a young person’s housing situation and potential homelessness.

Easing the transition from custody with a Home Detention Curfew

Depending on the length of sentence, some young people in custody may be eligible for HDC, which allows them to be released from custody early to a suitable address where they stay during certain hours, monitored by electronic tag. For many young people, this enables them to transition into the community, and means better access to employment, education and training opportunities.

However, HDC has previously been vastly underutilised, and the most up to date statistics show that only 15 per cent of those eligible being released under it from October 2016 to October 2017.³³ Despite this, in recent months practitioners reported an increased drive to release people on HDC. For this to happen, a young person needs an address to go to as they will be required to stay at that address, usually for at least 12 hours overnight. Whilst there are accommodation services to support releasing young people on HDC, such as the Bail and Accommodation Support Service, a general lack of accommodation can mean that many young people who may be eligible are not able to access HDC.

We also heard concerns that some young people provide addresses of family members, or friends who may not be suitable hosts, in order to secure their release on tag. It is critical that the right type of accommodation is available to ensure HDC supports a stable transition back into the community as part of that young person's resettlement journey.

“The pressure is on to get people out on tag because that’s the best way for them to resettle in the community gradually instead of in custody one day and in the community the next. It’s shown that it’s really productive for people to go out on HDC” – Rehabilitation worker, CRC

The Ministry of Justice should ensure that where use of Home Detention Curfew would be beneficial and appropriate to a young person, there is adequate supply of accommodation.



Young people leaving custody need access to a safe and stable home with an ongoing support network

Homelessness

“I was rough sleeping more or less. I was just knocking about. I did all-nighters in cars for one or two nights, here, there, going mate’s houses. I was about for a little bit... being homeless can give you a kick back towards that direction [offending]. When you’ve got no money, you turn hungry” – Jon

Analysis of Centrepont service user data shows that 43 per cent of prison leavers had experience of sleeping rough, compared to 28 per cent of other vulnerable people they supported. This suggests that prison leavers are a group particularly likely to have slept rough. Those who leave custody and experience homelessness are incredibly vulnerable and some might make risky decisions to get a warm bed for the night.

“I’ve got a young girl, she’s 21 or 22 and the reason she’s in custody is because she was homeless. She ended up staying with someone and they requested that she sell drugs as payment for her lodgings and then she got arrested and taken into custody”

– Rehabilitation worker, CRC

Young people who leave custody and become homeless may have little choice but to rely on negative social networks, such as people they knew prior to prison who were also involved in criminal activity. They may be more likely to reoffend to obtain money for food or to return to custody so that they have a roof over their head.

“They say to us, ‘I don’t wanna sleep on a park bench, I don’t wanna sleep in a tent, I don’t wanna sleep in a sleeping bag. I’ll do what I can to come back into custody. I’ve got a roof over my head and I’m fed and watered! I get it. We would do the same thing, who would want to sleep out in the cold?’” – Rehabilitation worker, CRC

The local housing authority has responsibility for supporting those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Centrepont estimates that 86,000 young people in the UK approached their local authority for help in 2016-17 because they were homeless or at risk of homelessness.³⁴ This research suggests that it has become common for a young person to have to wait until they have been released and then present as homeless before help could be sought.

“You used to be able to do some actual preparation work, get all those forms filled in pre-release and say ‘I’ve got this person coming out on this date’... [now it’s] being told by the council you need to come out on the day of release, come up to the council building and present as homeless, and that’s it, that’s all you can do”

– Engagement worker, charity

While work within the prison may begin three months prior to release to secure accommodation, practitioners expressed frustration that the local housing authorities are not always able to take this approach. They described how local authorities often want to complete an assessment in person, which is not possible while the young

person is in custody. It was also said to be difficult for local authorities to assign accommodation prior to release in case circumstances changed. Due to this uncertainty and the huge pressures on local authority housing teams, some young people are dealt with once they have reached crisis point and become homeless, not before.

A greater focus on prevention is central to the Homelessness Reduction Act and it is hoped that this will improve the support available to those preparing to leave custody. Guidance states that 'arrangements with prisons should ensure that the referral is made well in advance of the release date and that, with the individual's consent, appropriate information is supplied with the referral.'³⁵ Furthermore, the period within which a local authority should treat someone as threatened with homelessness and work to prevent this has been extended to 56 days, from 28. However, our research highlights that regardless of the period of time for considering the threat of homelessness some local authorities are struggling to effectively prevent homelessness for custody leavers.

Where homelessness has not been prevented, a young person will only receive the main homelessness duty if the local authority is satisfied that they are eligible for assistance, unintentionally homeless and also fall within a specified priority need group. Only then does the local authority have a duty to accommodate. Guidance stipulates that applicants may be deemed priority need because they are vulnerable as a result of being in prison; however, the research highlighted that custody leavers are very rarely deemed to be in priority need and that the interpretation of vulnerability has become narrower as pressure on local authorities and housing stock has increased.

“To be given priority need you really have to have a serious mental health problem, but then you have to get the evidence into the council to then be deemed priority need” – Reducing Reoffending worker, charity

One practitioner told us that an applicant would need a very serious mental health condition and would need to provide medical evidence to be accepted as priority need. Another described how a young person with schizophrenia was not accepted as in priority need and ended up attacking someone because he had not been receiving his medication. Both Nacro's Resettlement Advice Service and Centrepoin's national helpline receive calls from vulnerable custody leavers who been told they are not vulnerable enough to receive help. This includes people with chronic health issues, severe depression and significant learning disabilities.

Furthermore, practitioners described how young people are sometimes told they have made themselves intentionally homeless by committing a crime and receiving a custodial sentence. Being deemed intentionally homeless means they will not be entitled to assistance with accommodation.

“The thing is with local authorities, they're saying that these guys have made themselves homeless by committing the crime. A lot of the guys in custody think they are higher priority, but then the council tell us they literally made themselves homeless by committing the crime and going into custody” – Rehabilitation worker, CRC

We have also heard of examples of where local authorities have imposed blanket bans on providing accommodation for people leaving prison, as well as discharging a priority need by finding people intentionally homeless through a deliberate action or omission. The lack of stock has arguably led to a number of local authorities finding ways to discharge their duties in a chronic housing crisis.

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and the Ministry of Justice must ensure relevant learning from the Homelessness Trailblazer pilots, including prison pre-release protocols, specific to young people leaving custody, is disseminated and embedded into local authority practice across England.

Supported accommodation

Many of the practitioners we interviewed suggested that supported accommodation is often a preferable option for young custody leavers. With the right support, they can build the foundations they need to live independently

including accessing work, learning independent living skills and addressing any health needs they may have. Centrepont service user data shows that prison leavers are significantly more likely to have stayed in another hostel/ supported housing project prior to Centrepont; 63 per cent of prison leavers had previously stayed in a hostel or supported housing, compared to 44 per cent of young people who haven't been in prison. This may suggest that young people who have experienced custody are more likely to move around multiple homelessness providers.

“Supported accommodation, it depends on the nature of the offences. It's very difficult to house anybody with an arson conviction and it can be very difficult to house anyone with a sexual conviction” – Housing manager, charity

The research highlighted that certain convictions can make it even harder for young people to access a place in supported accommodation. At the time of writing, the future of supported accommodation is unclear. The government is currently considering how this type of accommodation should be funded. The most recent proposal is to remove this type of accommodation from the welfare system, with bed spaces funded locally through a ring-fenced grant. There are concerns that the funding of this grant may not be guaranteed over the long term and that different providers, serving different vulnerable groups, may need to compete for this. This could have hugely negative consequences for young people over 21 who have not got a statutory entitlement to housing including custody leavers. Furthermore, if bed spaces are funded through grants rather than welfare entitlement, young people will not be able to demonstrate their ability to pay rent and effectively manage a tenancy. This lack of rental history will make it very difficult to move on from supported accommodation.

Crucially, more accurate data collection is needed to understand how many young people are in need of supported housing on release from custody. Currently, there are no nationally collated figures that indicate the volume of young adults leaving prison in need of some form of supported housing. This information should be collected and supply should then be based on this.

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and the Ministry of Justice should work together to ensure funding for supported housing is directly linked to a national housing needs assessments of young people leaving custody.

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and the Ministry of Justice should work together to collate and publish national data on the number of young adults leaving custody and their housing needs and outcomes.

The private rented sector

The private rented sector can be difficult to navigate for even the most financially secure young person. The practitioners interviewed explained that the majority of landlords are reluctant to rent to young custody leavers as they are perceived to be risky tenants. Many young people leaving custody will not have a deposit, a guarantor or money to cover the initial few months', which are often requirements when accessing a private rental property.

“Not unless you've got a spare grand. All landlords generally want a month's rent upfront and a bond and they do reference checks, and these aren't just through lettings agencies, these are just private ones. They still want the same criteria. And they don't want DSS as well and that's the other problem for young people, 18-25s, they're not getting housing benefit now” – Engagement worker, charity

In 2017, the government committed to bringing in legislation to ban letting fees paid by tenants, as well as a cap on security deposits. Whilst this will go some way to reducing the costs of private rented accommodation, the need to provide a deposit still creates a huge barrier for many young people.

Good practice example:

Rent deposit schemes

Centrepoint and Nacro both operate rent deposit schemes, which have opened up access to the private rented sector for the young people they support. Rent deposits schemes are not a new concept, however they vary in the way in which they operate and are funded:

Centrepoint's rent deposit bond scheme: funded by private investment

Centrepoint has been running a rent deposit bond scheme in the North East for 13 years, for homeless young people including custody leavers. Rather than Centrepoint providing a cash deposit, a certificate is given to the landlord which guarantees that Centrepoint will cover any costs normally covered by a deposit, such as damage to the property. The scheme has a failure rate of only six per cent and a contingency budget of around £3,000 per year to cover costs. As many young people have been living independently for some time when costs are incurred, they are often in employment and therefore in a position to repay Centrepoint. The scheme has enabled hundreds of young people to access the private rented sector who could not otherwise have done so. Landlords have reacted very positively to the scheme and are satisfied with the guarantee provided by Centrepoint.

Nacro's rent deposit scheme: funded by Police and Crime Commissioners

Police and Crime Commissioners (PCC) are becoming increasingly involved in preventing and relieving homelessness by investing in rent deposit schemes as a way of reducing reoffending, enabling people to access the private rented sector where they would not normally be able to. Nacro operates a PCC funded rent deposit/bond scheme in Bedfordshire and Kent to assist service users in accessing private rented housing. For some service users, this has been the difference between finding a home and sleeping on the streets.

“Landlords definitely 100 per cent exclude not just young offenders, but offenders in general... As soon as I say ‘probation’ they say ‘no thanks’, they don’t even ask or want to know, not willing to give them a chance at all” – Planning and re-enablement co-ordinator, charity

Given the continued shortage of social housing, crucial work is needed to open up the private rented sector to young people leaving custody. Landlords must play a role in this, in understanding the support that young custody leavers need in order to make them viable tenants. Floating support has the potential to allay landlords' fears, if young people are supported by a dedicated key worker or mentor to maintain and manage their tenancy. The practitioners we interviewed explained how some young people simply need a little support while they develop independent living skills in a new tenancy, as perhaps they were in custody during those crucial years where most young people learn to live independently, often with the support of a family.

“Something where we would be able to explain to [landlords] that actually this is a section of society that could be really beneficial to them... I've worked with plenty of people who have turned their lives around and I just want them to see those people that might make some landlords realise” – Reducing reoffending worker, CRC

Good practice example:

Nacro Homes Agency

Nacro operates the Nacro Homes Agency (NHA), which intervenes in the private rented market to improve access to private rented accommodation for vulnerable people, including those leaving custody and who are entitled to exempt accommodation rent levels. Nacro works with individuals and families across the country providing access to stable, good quality housing. We do this through partnerships with local authorities, the National Probation Service and Community Rehabilitation Companies and Drug and Alcohol services. The NHA now provides services across the East Midlands, South Yorkshire, Staffordshire, Worcestershire, Essex, North West, Teesside.

Through the NHA, Nacro has been able to address some of these barriers, addressing landlords concerns about rent payment and standard of the property by underwriting these liabilities and providing the tenant with additional support. 63 per cent of all NHA residents move on their own tenancy or other safe and secure housing.

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and the Ministry of Justice should work together to guarantee deposits and rent for the first month for young adults leaving custody if going into private rented accommodation.

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and Ministry of Justice should fund programmes across all prisons to educate all young people leaving custody on tenancy management as part of preparation for release and provide mentors to help young people sustain tenancies on release as well as helping to allay landlord fear.

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and the Ministry of Justice should co-invest in the development and supply of innovative housing models for young custody leavers including through social investment.

Returning home to family

While the family can provide structural support in terms of a physical place to go back to, family and relationships also provide support guiding the shift towards a new identity, critical to resettlement. Research has suggested that maintaining positive links with family throughout custody can decrease the chances of reoffending.³⁶

The professionals that we interviewed suggested that wherever possible, the best chance of accommodation was for the young person to live with family. Nacro data shows that, in one area, 42 per cent of young adults state that they will return to family after leaving custody.³⁷ For some young people leaving custody, this will be the best option if they have positive and supportive relationships with their family members and home is a safe and suitable option.

“At the beginning you want to change the world and fix everything, but pretty soon you realise that’s not going to happen. We have to think, what’s plan b? Who can you go and stay with? Is there anybody you can stay with?”

– Rehabilitation worker, CRC

However, we heard that moving back in with family is not always the most appropriate option for young people leaving custody. Some young people, including care leavers, may have suffered abuse or neglect at home or may not have a family home to go back to. Centrepoint client data shows that homeless young people who have been in custody are twice as likely (29 per cent compared to 15 per cent) to have been asked to leave home by their parents, than homeless young people who have not been in custody. This suggests that young people who leave custody and return home might be particularly at risk of homelessness.

“When I came out I had no hostel to go to so I went straight home to my brother’s. I lived with him for a bit but then I had to move out because I started having family problems. I became homeless” – Liam

“I preferred being arrested and spending a night in a cell than being at home with my mum” – young people involved in Beyond Youth Custody consultation

Our evidence highlights that it should never be assumed that a family home is the best accommodation option for a young person, even if the other options seem scarce. In the context of a chronic lack of housing, many young people are likely to feel that this is their only choice. Homelessness guidance from MHCLG states “in most cases,

but particularly with young people, contact should be made with family to try and support a return home (where safe to do so) if only on a temporary basis.”³⁸ However, our research suggests that more should be done to assess whether a return home is in fact the right option and what could be done earlier on in custody to ensure the transition back to family is as smooth as it can be. The young person’s family should be involved in their resettlement plans from the outset, even if it is unlikely they will be able to return home as they may still offer a vital support network to the young person upon release.³⁹

Enabling release on temporary license (ROTL), more family visits and contact as well as access to support where breakdown has occurred are critical to ensuring a positive move back to the family home. There are a number of voluntary organisations working in this area, but some have referenced bureaucracy and resource as significantly hampering their ability to provide as much consistent support as is needed for individuals and their families throughout custody and into the community.⁴⁰

Care leavers and custody

All care leavers, despite time spent in custody, are entitled to receive:

- Priority need status until their 21st birthday, and therefore access to housing through the local housing authority.
- A pathway plan which identifies their needs and how they will be met, including the services, skills and actions needed for young people to successfully transition to independent living.
- Support from a Personal Advisor until they are 25 to support them as they transition to independence.

The research highlighted issues around young people entering the prison system while in care, but then receiving no care leaver support upon release, despite their entitlement to do so. However, we heard concerns from practitioners that the mechanisms are not in place to identify a care leaver and that some care leavers are fearful of disclosing this information within a court setting.

“Before I went to prison I had a key worker, social worker, everything. But then I went to prison. That’s all gone now” – Cam

The Ministry of Justice should ensure that alongside the implementation and funding of the Farmer Review recommendations, early family support is in place where identified as appropriate for a young person to return home including a focus on building and maintaining positive relationships while in custody and access to release on temporary licence (ROTL).

Her Majesty’s Prison and Probation Service should amend Basic Custody Screening Tools to ensure that where the young person has identified they will return to family on discharge, specific questions focus on the suitability of this and flag a need for targeted support throughout custody.

Young people leaving custody need financial security

To access and sustain accommodation young people need a stable income. While some custody leavers might have employment lined up as part of through the gate support, many may need to claim Universal Credit until they find their feet.

Financial security through the welfare system

Throughout interviews with young people there was a very clear message: the benefit system is complex. Upon leaving custody young people may not know what to apply for and how to do so.

“From the start [of claiming benefits] it was hard... it’s a headache because obviously I’ve been sat in jail for two a half years. So to come out, there’s this system and that system. It’s too new; it plays with your head” – Jon

A prisoner can retain their housing benefit if they are due to be released within 13 weeks, and continue to receive the housing element of Universal Credit for six months if they are already claiming. However, this will not apply to those with longer sentences or those who were living at home with family prior to prison.

Completing a new Universal Credit claim within prison is challenging as claims must be made online and access to the internet or a Jobcentre Plus work coach was seen as inconsistent and often not available. Prisoners are also unlikely to have access to the personal documentation needed for their claim. Care leavers are able to make an advance claim to Universal Credit; while the claim cannot be submitted until they are 18, they attend a pre-claim interview and have paperwork checked in advance so that upon turning 18, their claim is immediately submitted. A similar system could work for those leaving custody, enabling them to prepare their application ready to submit upon release.

Claimants can face up to a five week wait for their first Universal Credit payment. Claimants can apply for an advance payment to be paid back over a period of up to 12 months; however this debt reduces the monthly payments a young person receives which they may struggle to manage. Young people also flagged administrative issues with their Universal Credit housing payment not going to their landlord, which also pushes them into arrears:

“Money is missing from Universal Credit, it’s affecting my housing. £400-£500 rent hasn’t been paid. Now they are taking £31 a month from my allowance to repay it, so my allowance comes down. I’ve got less money. It’s not enough at all” – Dan

Complexities around claiming Universal Credit means clear information and guidance for both practitioners and individuals is critical. We heard an example from an organisation working with a 24 year old custody leaver presenting at a local authority and being told he wasn’t able to access housing support because he wasn’t registered for Universal Credit, however as he didn’t have an address, he couldn’t register for Universal Credit.⁴¹ Further, the time that a young adult is released is also critical – Friday releases, or late in the afternoon makes presenting at a local housing authority or Jobcentre Plus impossible.

The Department for Work and Pensions should facilitate advance claims to Universal Credit for those preparing to leave custody, whether this is online or via a paper form, so that custody leavers can prepare their benefit claim prior to release and then submit it immediately upon release.

The Ministry of Justice should provide a funding mechanism so that where young people have claimed an advance payment, it is not deducted from future Universal Credit payments.

Her Majesty’s Prison and Probation Service should plan releases of young people so they are not released on a Friday/at a time of the day when they will not be able to present at a local housing authority or the JobCentre Plus.

Local housing authorities should ensure that advice and information developed for custody leavers (as per the Homelessness Reduction Act) includes information about emergency financial support, such as hardship payments.

Lower levels of benefit entitlement for young people

Young people are entitled to a lower rate of benefit than their older peers, despite the cost of living not being any lower, therefore financially disadvantaging young people.

Universal Credit basic allowance	Single claimant under 25: £251.77 per month	Single claimant aged 25 or over: £317.82 per month
Housing entitlement as per the Local Housing Allowance	Single claimant under 35: Entitled to the lower shared accommodation rate E.g. £45 per week in Sunderland	Age 35 and over: Entitled to the higher one bedroom rate E.g. £88 per week in Sunderland
Exemptions: the shared accommodation rate will not apply if you are 25 or over and have lived in a homeless hostel for at least three months or are a former prisoner managed under MAPPA		

For young people looking to access the private rented sector, the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) is used to calculate how much housing support they are entitled to. It is set at the 30th percentile on a list of rents in the broad market area, though in reality it does not even meet this level as it has been frozen since 2016. For their housing costs, young people under 35 will only be entitled to the shared accommodation rate of housing support. In areas with a competitive housing market, this will make it difficult to access housing. It may also not be suitable for a young person leaving custody to live in shared accommodation as it may not support the shift in identity needed to desist from future criminal behaviour. Despite this, only young people released on MAPPA are exempt from the shared accommodation rate once they turn 25, while other custody leavers will remain on the lower rate of benefit.

The Department for Work and Pensions should exempt all custody leavers under 25 from the shared accommodation rate of the local housing allowance to increase their ability to access a private rented tenancy.

Financial support from the prison estate

The amount of money someone receives when they leave prison, commonly referred to as the discharge grant, has remained at £46 for over 15 years. For many people leaving prison even with accommodation, it provides very little in the way of financial support for someone who has to wait up to five weeks to receive benefits or if they are going into employment, to cover the period of time before they receive any income. This might need to cover essential items such as food, toiletries and clothing.

The Ministry of Justice should increase the discharge grant in line with inflation.

Financial security through employment

“Definitely getting a job is the most important, you need money. I went to jail because I needed to make money” – Aaron

Both young people and practitioners highlighted the importance of financial stability through employment as a means of preventing reoffending and ensuring accommodation is sustainable in the longer term. Centrepoint data shows that homeless young people who have been in prison are significantly more likely to be unemployed than the wider youth homeless cohort; 55 per cent were jobseekers compared to 36 per cent of their Centrepoint peers. Furthermore, only seven per cent of custody leavers were studying full time, compared to 23 per cent of the Centrepoint population that had not been in custody.⁴²

Within prisons, a range of different providers offer employment and skills courses. A Work and Pensions Select Committee inquiry found that provision is “fragmented, duplicated and difficult to navigate”.⁴³ The prospect of employment is essential in terms of giving a custody leaver a chance at stable housing but also a sense of self-worth and ambition for the future. There is no one person solely responsible for a prisoner’s employment, though there is an expectation on organisations working in CRCs to work with prisoners to achieve employment or signpost them to opportunities.⁴⁴ Where Jobcentre Plus work coaches exist, current provision is inconsistent and even where work readiness training does exist, it does not necessarily match the employment opportunities in the community. The closure of the Careers Advice service in prisons further decreases the support available to young people to find employment.

During our research, we heard about the value of innovative through the gate employment opportunities in providing young people with work. This enables young people to prepare for a specific role by offering training while still in prison, with a job opportunity available upon release.

“People who have jobs in the community who go out to work do far better when they’re released. That job often continues once they’re released as well. They know the uniform they put on, they know what to do when they’re there when everything else is new” – Rehabilitation worker, CRC

Some young people may be released on temporary licence (ROTL) in order to start working before release. This is essential in offering a sense of continuity and stability as young people leave custody and allows young people to demonstrate that they have an income to potential landlords.

Redemption Roasters

Based in HMYOI Aylesbury, Redemption Roasters run an industrial-scale coffee roastery and barista academy aimed at teaching young offenders state of the art coffee skills. Ex-offenders are 50 per cent less likely to reoffend if they have skills and a job on release. Therefore and as part of Redemption Roaster's mission to help young offenders successfully reintegrate into society, they train them in professional roasting and competition-level barista skills. On release, 'graduates' are hired in one of Redemption's central London shops or referred to a growing number of specialty coffee wholesale customers.

"Redemption Roasters set up a roaster within the prison. They're a wholesale company. And so we used to roast the beans in the prison, package them, deliver them, label them. We did all the packaging ourselves. On top of that we worked in a shop. They put you through a two-week training course and show you more than the basics. You learn the science behind it.

After those two weeks they give you further training in the more practical side of it. Once you've done that for about three to four months, they will train you in the roasting side of things which is far more complex and complicated. I was trying to figure out what the hell I was going to do. They trained me and two weeks after my training they offered me a job. The day after I got released I went straight to work."

"If it wasn't for my job, I would be screwed in every possible way. I had no plans, no future, no nothing. I wouldn't even have had money enough to visit my family." – Ali

Further, for young people who leave custody without a job, a criminal record continues to be a key barrier to employment, education and housing. An overly complex system of criminal record disclosure means that individuals often over disclose where employers and landlords are not clear about what they can and cannot legally ask applicants. This complex system is challenging not only for the individual but the practitioners working with young people.

Nacro works directly with employers and individuals through its Resettlement Advice Service to provide accredited information, advice, guidance and legal advocacy support to individuals affected by a criminal record in various areas of their lives through a free confidential national helpline and our website; as well as offering advice on accessing education and employment. However, criminal records continue to pose a significant barrier to many young people who want to move their futures forward.

"When it comes to getting jobs, it's very hard to get a job, especially needing a DBS check. The only jobs I can get - government say I have to get a legit job and get off benefits - but you get refused all jobs. I can only get behind the scenes jobs, cash in hand. That's illegal but it's all I get offered" – Jon

The Ministry of Justice should commission a fundamental review and reform the overly complex criminal records regime.

Conclusion

Identifying safe and sustainable accommodation is critical to effective resettlement and provides a crucial building block towards supporting young people to desist from criminal behaviour. However, young adult custody leavers in particular currently face a wide range of challenges in accessing and sustaining accommodation. The growing body of research around adopting a distinct approach to young adults in the criminal justice system, coupled with high reoffending rates highlights the challenges in effective resettlement for this group. Appropriate housing plays a key role in this.

Based on our work at Nacro and Centrepont, we know that young people leaving custody can turn their lives around with the right support. Young people need to have access to support from a range of agencies, however, at present there is lack of targeted resource and co-ordination of services both at a local and national level.

Our research suggests that structures are not in place for young people to get the support they need while in custody to prepare for release, leaving them to navigate a complex housing and welfare system alone. In some circumstances, they may be forced to return home even if it is not a suitable environment. At worst, they might find themselves homeless and at risk. Pressures across the system limit the support that practitioners are able to put in place, meaning that young people have to wait until crisis point before getting help. Current local authority practices can further exacerbate the issue; with some young people being deemed intentionally homeless because of the crime they committed. This restricts their ability to turn their lives around and desist from crime.

We hope that the Homelessness Reduction Act will address some of the problems we found in our work, however a national, cross departmental approach is needed to unblock the current barriers to accessing suitable housing for young adults leaving custody. We have put together a set of practical recommendations to support such an approach to this. Some of these recommendations build on work already being done in some areas while others require a stronger push from government to ensure that structural barriers are removed, to ensure every young adult leaving custody can gain better access to housing on release.



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