NAYJBriefing

National Association for Youth Justice
Justice for Children in Trouble

Explaining desistance: looking forward, not backwards

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Contents

The NAYJ is a registered charity (no. 1138177) and membership organisation campaigning for the rights of – and justice for – children in trouble with the law.

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● Introduction

Over the past five years, there has been a marked shift from the 'risk' paradigm to 'desistance' theories as the underpinning philosophy of youth justice intervention, prompted largely by significant and extended academic critique (see, for example, Haines and Case, 2015). While slippages into the language of risk are still evident (Haines and Case, 2018; Gibbs, 2019), the Youth Justice Board (YJB) and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation (HMI Probation) have embraced the language of desistance. Desistance is referenced throughout the new YJB national standards, as well as the accompanying case management guidance (MoJ/YJB, 2019; YJB, 2019). Assetplus, the updated youth justice assessment tool implemented in 2015, also draws on desistance thinking through placing 'more emphasis on strengths and on factors which support/hinder desistance from offending' (YJB, 2014: 6). This notably departs from its predecessor, Asset, which was explicitly grounded in risk. At HMI Probation, desistance inspired a thematic inspection dedicated to the subject (HMI Probation, 2016) and infuses the youth offending team (YOT) inspection framework (which is currently the subject of consultation, with a view to revision) (HMI Probation, 2019a).

However, the desistance paradigm has been transplanted into youth justice from the adult arena with remarkably little academic critique about its transferability and application to children (with the exception of Hampson, 2018; Gray and Smith, 2019). There is good reason to think that desistance theories are relevant to children since they seek to understand the natural developmental and life changes that lead people to move away from offending, and most children do grow out of offending. Yet, desistance thinking is predominantly based on research with adults: if one takes the most influential studies on desistance, their samples and/or study focus are almost invariably those aged 18 and above.[1] This is because desistance is typically something that is associated with late adolescence and early adulthood (McAra and McVie, 2017; Graham and Bowling, 1995) although it is a phenomenon experienced throughout childhood (Loeber et al., 2016) as will be discussed later. For this reason, despite it being the case that most children grow out of offending, one cannot assume that the lessons from desistance research apply equally, or in the same way, to children.

This paper seeks to address some of these issues, first providing an overview of the risk and desistance models, and the differences between them, before moving onto an examination of the relevance and application of desistance in a youth justice context.

● Overview and critique of the risk paradigm

Against a backdrop of heightened insecurity about youth crime, political responses that promised to mitigate against such perceived risks and 'nip crime in the bud' (Blair, 2007) became increasingly popularised in the 1990s. Under New Labour, the *prevention of offending* subsequently became the call to arms for youth justice in England and Wales, established as its (first) statutory aim under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. At the heart of this agenda lay the Risk Factor Prevention Paradigm (RFPP), based on the uncritical and simplistic adoption of a body of research purportedly able to identify the *risk factors* that predict children's offending and thus the preventative methods that can ameliorate them. Embraced heavily by the Government(s) of the day (and since), risk thinking has dominated youth justice for much of the past 20 years. It manifested in *Asset,* the default tool for assessing the (criminogenic)

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[1] For example, of the nine 'landmark' studies on desistance critically discussed by Farrall et al. (2014), only one (Graham and Bowling's [1995] *Young People and Crime*) explored desistance amongst children.

needs of children in contact with the youth justice system, which required practitioners to consider and score 12 aspects of children's lives (such as thinking and behaviour; and living arrangements) in relation to their association with their likelihood of reoffending. The calculated risk of reoffending influenced the nature and intensity of compulsory intervention, by means of the Scaled Approach, which mandated that the number of appointments that children were obliged to attend was determined by the Asset score.

Within the academic community in particular, the RFPP has been the subject of sustained and wide-ranging critique. Case and Haines (2009) have pointed out the methodological flaws implicit in the risk-factor research on the grounds that it seeks to predict individual risk of offending on the basis of aggregate data. There has been much criticism too of the *deficit-model* of such approaches due to their heavy emphasis on the *risks* presented by children who offend, to the neglect of work that fosters strengths and opportunities (Hampson, 2018; Robinson, 2016; Smith, 2014; Case and Haines, 2009). Relatedly, concern has been expressed at the narrow focus only on individuals' needs that are associated with their offending (i.e. criminogenic); thus pursuing rehabilitation solely as a means to an end (reducing crime), rather than recognising that supporting people to lead altogether better lives is an important end in itself (McNeill, 2009; see also Robinson, 2016). As McNeill has said 'the dominance of a "risk" or "protection" discourse is very likely to frustrate its own purpose if it identifies offenders with the worst aspects of themselves, if it leads practitioners to neglect of offenders' needs, strengths, goals and aspirations' (2009: 36). In this way, risk-based approaches can be seen as backward-looking and deficit-focused.

The risk movement has been accused too of resulting in programme fetishism, whereby interventions targeting *individual* factors (which are arguably within the easiest reach of practitioners) such as 'anger management' and 'consequential thinking' are regarded as the tour de force of rehabilitative activity. Yet, the danger is that such efforts ultimately place blame and responsibility for children's behaviour on their faulty thinking, overlooking the social and material context of their offending (Sharpe, 2012; Phoenix, 2009) and defining children in terms of their offending behaviour. In addition, the focus of risk-based approaches on the type and content of interventions meant that there was a tendency to neglect the centrality of children's engagement to effective intervention. This was arguably compounded by a lack of research on the issue of engagement (and relationships) due to 'prevailing orthodoxies regarding what constitutes valid research evidence prevent[ing] certain questions about what works and how from being studied' (Mason and Prior, 2010: 211). While the YJB began to acknowledge the importance of engagement from 2008 (reflected in an extensive literature review on the topic, as the basis for a Key Elements of Effective Practice [KEEP] manual on engagement), this was not easily reconcilable with the Scaled Approach and *Asset* framework. As Haines and Case (2015: 147) contend:

> Scaled Approach assessment and intervention is 'done to' children by practitioners rather than 'conducted with' children through detailed consultation and participation. Therefore, there is ironic potential for youth justice processes (for example assessment, supervision and intervention) to actively *disengage* children.

Thus, there lay a tension at the heart of youth justice policy where the YJB recognised that effective intervention required the engagement of the child, but this was mitigated against by the very risk paradigm that pervaded youth justice. Moreover, the primacy of prescribed programmes as the means of achieving the primary goal of reducing reoffending (and risk) subverts the importance of meaningful, trusting relationships, which are less amenable to procedure and measurement but equally, if not more, important for changing lives. As France and Homel (2006: 305) argue, what children value but are often not receiving 'is not so much

programmes and content, but a good supportive relationship with an adult who is not judgemental and is able to offer guidance and advocacy when needed'.

A further criticism is the limited role of children's agency and participation inherent in risk models (Case et al., 2020). Using the lens of risk necessitates a view of the child as highly determined by their risk factors overlooking and underplaying their agency. (Yet, paradoxically, it places an emphasis on programmes that attempt to change the individual, thus simultaneously responsibilising children for their ability to stop offending.) Related to this, the premise of effective intervention in risk-based approaches is the assessment of risk by practitioners. Thus, there is, fundamentally, limited scope for children to have a voice in explaining the reasons behind their behaviour and what they think would help them move away from offending, let alone their ambitions and aspirations for the future. One might point to the existence of the 'What Do You Think?' questionnaire, a self-assessment for children about their behaviour, which formed part of the practitioner *Asset* assessment. But evidence suggests that the questionnaires were often overlooked by practitioners (Baker et al., 2003: 7) and that children with limited literacy skills found them difficult to complete (Baker, 2005).

● Overview of the desistance paradigm

Desistance, in its simplest form, entails the stopping of offending, although debate abounds as to how it should be defined, measured and conceptualised. It is important to recognise that the desistance paradigm has a qualitatively different starting point from the risk model in two key ways. First, it seeks to explain *how* individuals *give up* offending, rather than seeking to explain offending. Second, desistance is a *process* (to be supported) rather than an *intervention* to be delivered based on a child's propensity to reoffend, as with risk. The process of desistance is protracted, characterised by 'a pendulum of ambivalence' (Burnett, 2004: 169). Maruna and Farrall (2004) contend that there are distinct phases to this journey - primary and secondary desistance - with the former defined as a lull in offending and the latter understood as the assumption of a non-offender identity or role. Yet, King (2013) has persuasively shown that identity-change begins early on in the desistance process, while Laub and Sampson have argued that cognitive transformation is not necessary for cessation (2003: 279). McNeill (2014) has added the concept of tertiary desistance, which refers to corroboration from others of one's change and acceptance into society. This highlights that the way society responds to children, and the structural obstacles to change faced by disadvantaged children, are a key issue for youth justice practice. It suggests that the responsibility for supporting desistance is shared between society and agencies of the state.

Research has sought to identify the factors associated with desistance, which typically fall into three broad categories (for a detailed review, see: Weaver, 2016; Farrall et al., 2014). Early studies typically understood desistance as determined at the *individu*al level. This included 'maturational reform' theories, which viewed desistance as a symptom of the physiological changes of ageing (Glueck and Glueck, 1974; Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990). These are closely linked to notions of growing out of crime and thus particularly pertinent to youth justice. Also in this category are rational choice theories, which explain change as a result of individual conscious volition (Clark and Cornish, 1985). In contrast, *structural* theorists explain desistance as correlated with life-course events, such as family relationships and employment, which provide a stake in conformity (Sampson and Laub, 2003). More recently, research has explained desistance in relation to the *interaction* between changes to the individual's social context as well as their decisions and attitudes towards offending (King, 2014; Barry, 2010; Bottoms et al., 2004).

Cutting across these paradigms is a growing body of work that emphasises the importance in desistance of a shift towards a conventional self-identity. However, there are differing views as to how and when in the process this comes about. From a rational choice perspective, Paternoster and Bushway (2009: 1106-1133) propose that desistance hinges on 'intentional self-change'. By their account, this develops from growing dissatisfaction with crime, culminating in 'a crystallisation of discontent', together with a desire to avoid a feared potential future self and a vision of their positive potential self. From a more interactionist perspective, Giordano et al. (2002: 1001), on the basis of findings from the Ohio Life Course Study, focusing on adult women's narratives of desistance,[2] outline a theory of cognitive transformation comprising four phases: a cognitive shift towards openness to change; exposure to 'hooks for change' (such as having children) which, crucially 'has meaning, salience or importance for the individual'; the envisioning of a conventional 'replacement self'; and finally, 'transformation in the way the actor views the deviant behaviour or lifestyle itself'. Slightly differently, Maruna (2001) found that rather than 'knifing off' their past identity, the desisters in his sample re-constructed their historical narrative in a way that accorded with, and necessitated, their rehabilitated self. Desisters exhibited a 'redemption script', viewing themselves as essentially good persons, drawn into criminality as victims of society, and empowered to discover their true-self, usually 'with the help of some outside force, someone who "believed in"' them (2001: 87). In contrast, persisters employed a 'condemnation script', characterised by 'a sense of being doomed or fated in their situation', which translated into a lack of agency and self-efficacy (2001: 11).

A developing area of research concerns the role that criminal justice intervention can play in assisting the desistance journey. McNeill et al. (2012) have helpfully summarised the lessons from this literature into eight key principles for desistance-focused practice:

1   Recognising the complexity of the desistance process, including through 'find(ing) ways to manage setbacks and difficulties constructively' and understanding that positive effects may not emerge for a considerable time.
2   Acknowledging the individualised and subjective nature of desistance, and accordingly that 'one-size-fits-all interventions will not work'.
3   Supporting and developing individuals' motivation, self-belief and hope as key practitioner tasks;
4   Working *with* rather than *on* 'would-be desisters', and nurturing self-efficacy;
5   The centrality of relationships to support change, both between practitioners and service users, and with those who matter to the latter.
6   Focusing on both the individual who has offended *and* their personal and social circumstances 'through developing social capital and with it the opportunities to apply these skills, or to practice newly forming identities';
7   Developing the individual's own strengths and resources, and those in their social networks; and
8   'Striving to more clearly recognise positive potential and development, and…avoid identifying people with the behaviours we want them to leave behind' (adapted from McNeill, 2016: 275-7).

Within the youth justice context in particular, one might add to McNeill et al.'s (2012) list, the concept of *participation*. This means giving children a genuine voice and role in shaping

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[2] Their 2002 article was based on the Ohio Life Course Study sample of 254 delinquent girls and boys (split equally) recruited in 1982 from state-level institutions, 85 per cent of whom (109 females and 101 males) were subsequently followed-up in 1995. The authors analysis is based primarily on the women's experiences of desistance (97 life history interviews) due to the lack of longitudinal data on female offenders (2002: 1005-9).

decisions that affect them, in line with Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). This states that: 'Children have a right to say what they think should happen, when adults are making decisions that affect them, and to have their opinions taken into account' (UNCRC, 1989). Participation is not only a rights issue, but, as importantly, may increase children's engagement with youth justice services and their motivation to move away from offending (Creaney, 2014).

This starkly contrasts with the risk agenda in which short-term reconviction rates are the yardstick of success (Bateman and Wigzell, 2020), the causes of offending are individualised, there is a narrow focus on criminogenic need, 'off the shelf' programmes are privileged and there are, inherently, limited opportunities for children's participation.

McNeill (2006) argues that the desistance evidence points to the need for a fundamental shift in the conceptualisation of criminal justice practice, from a preoccupation with how *practice* should be constructed (encapsulated by 'what works' paradigm) to one grounded in how *change* occurs (the 'desistance paradigm'). Understood in this way, no one activity can effect change (such as programmes or people), but instead services should:

> *...respect and foster agency and reflexivity; they need to be based on legitimate and respectful relationships; they need to focus on social capital (opportunities) as well as human capital (motivations and capacities); and they also need to exploit strengths as well as addressing needs and risks* (McNeill, 2006: 55).

However, challenges in genuinely translating desistance thinking into youth justice practice point to the need for a shift at societal, political, ideological, cultural and organisational levels if such a reorientation is to take place, as will be discussed later.

● Critiquing desistance in youth justice

Desistance and children?

Despite the transplanting of desistance into youth justice in recent years, there is some reason to question its relevance and applicability to under-18s. Amongst these are the age-crime curve and the transferability of desistance evidence given that it predominantly springs from studies with adults.

The age-crime curve

The relationship between age and crime is one of the enduring 'truths' of criminology. In Gottfredson and Hirschi's words 'the empirical fact of a decline in the crime rate with age is beyond dispute' (1990: 131). The age-crime curve, an asymmetrical bell shape, reflects the steep increase in offending over the teenage years, which typically peaks between the late teens and early 20s, then rapidly decreases, flattening into a slower decline (McAra and McVie, 2017; Graham and Bowling, 1995). On one hand, this might be used to question the relevance of desistance thinking to under-18s since it is typically a process associated with adulthood. Yet, on the other hand, as noted earlier, given that most children do grow out of offending as they transition to adulthood, we might consider that the desistance paradigm is suitable for this young age group, possibly even more so. Let's consider the evidence about age-related changes in offending further.

Although there are similarities in aggregate age-crime curves, there are important shifts in the precise shape and peak of the curve dependent on a range of variables, including gender,

crime type, jurisdiction, socio-economic group and time period (McAra and McVie, 2017; Matthews and Minton, 2017; McVie, 2004). For example, girls typically have a lower peak age of offending (14-16) than boys (18-21) (see for example, Graham and Bowling, 1995; McIvor et al., 2004; Flood-Page et al., 2000) and a steeper desistance curve[3] than boys (Smith, 2006). However, other research has found a lower peak age of offending for both boys and girls (14-15 years) than is typical (McVie, 2004). There is significant variation too in the peak offending age for different offence types (McVie, 2004; Flood-Page et al, 2000; Graham and Bowling, 1995). As a case in point, Flood-Page et al. (2000: 20) found that although boys' peak offending age for all offences was 18, it fell to 15 if they excluded those who only committed fraud or workplace theft.[4] In addition, as Loeber et al. (2016: 88) argue, 'desistance processes are not limited to the down-slope of the age-crime curve, but evolve and take place throughout the course of that curve'. For example, Stouthamer-Loeber et al. (2010) found that in the youngest cohort of the Pittsburgh Youth Study, 31 per cent of those who began offending in middle childhood and 19 per cent of those who began in late childhood had desisted by early adolescence (as cited in Loeber et al., 2016: 88).[5] Thus, 'desistance from delinquency can best be conceptualised as a process that takes place between childhood and adulthood, and that is not solely taking place during late adolescence/ early adulthood' (Loeber et al., 2016: 89).

Factors in adolescent desistance

Late adolescence is clearly a time when some individuals 'start to stop' (McMahon and Jump, 2018: 3) or have already stopped offending. However, as Mulvey et al. (2004) contend, our understanding of desistance in adolescence remains limited, including whether the same factors are involved as in adulthood:

> *It would be even more useful, however, to know what factors prompt positive change among these [serious offender] adolescents during this period. Unfortunately, current research on this topic is also sparse. A limited number of studies have identified a few factors, such as a positive marriage or steady employment, as likely candidates for promoting positive change (Laub et al., 1998). These studies, however, have focused on adults, and it is not known whether the same, or even comparable, factors affect juveniles similarly* (Mulvey et al., 2004: 223)

In particular, the developmental changes afoot during adolescence may have distinct implications for the factors associated with desistance, including 'one's sense of personal agency, psychological capacities, attitudes and beliefs, or social context' (Mulvey et al., 2004: 223).

In recent years, a growing body of research on desistance during adolescence has begun to address these questions. There are limitations to many of these studies insofar as they often comprise very small samples and/or lack follow-up to determine whether 'desisters' really stopped or significantly reduced their offending. Nevertheless, taken together this literature suggests that there are commonalities in the desistance pathways of adults and adolescents,

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[3] That is, a more rapid reduction in offending.

[4] However, there is a question as to whether this is reflective of differential desistance patterns for different types of offending or, rather, the transfer to new forms of illegal behaviour that are harder to detect and seen as more socially acceptable.

[5] The Pittsburgh Youth Study followed a randomly selected sample of 1,500 boys across three cohorts who were in the first, fourth and seventh grades of school from when the study began in 1987/88 (referred to as the youngest, middle and oldest cohorts). The youngest cohort was studied from 6-19 and then again at ages 25 and 28; the middle cohort was assessed from 13-25 and then again at age 23; and the oldest cohort was studied from 13-25 and then again at aged 35. (For further information see: http://www.lifehistorystudies.pitt.edu/pittsburgh-youth-study.)

including the role of positive structural changes, agency, and supportive relationships. However, the research also indicates that there are important areas of difference in relation to desistance and children that are, as yet, insufficiently understood. These include the distinct constraints experienced by children in exercising their agency, and the subsequent need for increased support in this regard; the role of maturation processes; and the greater potential importance of prosocial relationships. There are inconsistencies in the existing evidence base too concerning the role and nature of identity shifts and positive structural changes in desistance amongst under-18s.

Socio-structural factors

The two largest UK studies of desistance that included under-18s found that the 'traditional' structural correlates of desistance, such as family formulation and employment, were unimportant for under-18s (and indeed this may be the case more generally for marriage[6]) (Graham and Bowling, 1995; McIvor et al, 2004).[7] Instead, other more 'age appropriate' positive socio-structural developments were more relevant to the age group including school completion for girls aged 14-17 (but not boys) (Graham and Bowling, 1995: 59) and disengagement from offending peers (Graham and Bowling, 1995; McIvor et al., 2004; see also Barry, 2006; McMahon and Jump, 2018). However, more recent research suggests that employment does play an important role in desistance for under-18s. McMahon and Jump's (2018: 11-12) desistance study with 21 children, aged 13-17, with histories of 'persistent and serious' offending reported that positive structural changes, such as education, training, employment and reparation of family relationships, appeared to 'play a particularly dominant role in young offenders' desistance'. Notably, findings from the Sheffield Desistance Study also point to the importance of reconciliations with family members in the desistance pathways of young adults (Bottoms and Shapland, 2016: 114).

Maturation

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the importance of maturation in desistance is a recurrent theme in studies involving under-18s, manifest in being less impulsive and understanding the moral and personal consequences of offending (Graham and Bowling, 1995; McIvor et al., 2004; McMahon and Jump, 2018; Beyond Youth Custody, 2017). While understanding of the role of maturation in desistance remains limited – a legacy of employing it in a tautological way[8] – in recent years there has been renewed interest in the concept that suggests, perhaps unsurprisingly, its significance in explaining adolescent and young adult withdrawal from offending (Mulvey and Schubert, 2016; Bottoms and Shapland, 2016; Rocque, 2015). For example, Bottoms and Shapland (2016: 107-11) identified maturation as a prominent feature

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[6] There is evidence that marriage may no longer be as significant to desistance given changes in modern society since the Gluecks' 1940 study on which Sampson and Laub conducted their research (McAra and McVie, 2017: 620).

[7] Graham and Bowling's (1995) research comprised a survey with a random sample of 1,721 young people (aged 14 – 25 years) about their background, family life, school experiences and lifestyles, including involvement in offending, with desistance analysis focused on a sub-section of 166 'desisters' and 226 'persisters' (1995: 52); and life history interviews with 21 'desisters' (defined as those who had not reported offending within the past year), comprising 10 young men and 11 young women aged 16-27 (1995: 68). McIvor et al. (2004) *Understanding Offending Among Young People* study examined resistance, desistance and persistence amongst 276 young people in Scotland across three age groups (aged 14-15 years, 18-19 years and 22-25 years).

[8] That is, that maturation results in desistance while desistance is evidence of maturity (Bottoms and Shapland, 2016: 197).

in the narratives of their young adult[9] 'would-be desisters', characterised by increased responsibility and improved self-control. However, they argue that it should be conceptualised as 'active maturation' to reflect that it is 'animated by the *impetus* of offenders themselves' and 'not simply an internal psychological matter [but]… continually shaped, prompted and/or inhibited by relationships with significant others' (2016: 108; author's emphasis). This finding is likely to be relevant to under-18s given that *psychosocial maturation*[10] steadily increases from early adolescence (Mulvey and Schubert, 2016). That said, Bottoms and Shapland note that many of their sample exercised self-control *synchronically* (Kennett, 2001), deliberately avoiding potentially criminogenic situations 'by restructuring their lives so as to avoid meeting former criminal associates, or deliberately not going to certain pubs' (2016: 111). Such tactics are likely to be less available to under-18s, who by dint of their young age and associated childhood status may have less discretion over their activities or where they spend their time (e.g. in school).

Points for practice:

- **Research indicates the importance, for services and practitioners working with children and their families, of developing opportunities and resources that provide pathways out of criminogenic contexts, such as through the provision of alternative leisure activities.**

Agency

Related to this, in line with some of the desistance research with adults, agency has been identified as important to young people's ability to desist, with some potential differences with adults. There is some evidence that children's sense of agency increases with age (both cognitively and socially). Haigh's (2009) study of desistance amongst 25 young people in Australia (split into those aged 14-17 [15 interviews] and 18-24 years [10 interviews]) reported that agentic change was critical to desistance amongst the older group. However, younger interviewees highlighted the role of external influences, such as changing schools and parental pressure. Nevertheless, in line with Giordano et al.'s (2002) cognitive theory of desistance, the study asserts that a significant change in the interpretation of their lives underlay all participants' attempts to desist such that external challenges to 'doing crime' and opportunities to change became 'relevant' (2009: no page).

In their child-focused study of desistance, McMahon and Jump (2018) found evidence of 'condemnation' scripts amongst those who persisted, as first identified in Maruna's (2001) work with adults. Although such scripts were 'perhaps less developed' with the children in their sample, there was a sense of 'inevitability' in their continued offending, suggesting a lack of personal agency (2018: 12). Meanwhile, those who desisted had more hopeful narratives and underlined the role of agency in change, although McMahon and Jump (2018) suggested that the constraints of their life stage may render them less able to exercise it. However, findings from Fitzpatrick et al.'s (2015) study of personal goal aspirations amongst 14 boys under YOS supervision in the UK suggests that aspects of 'condemnation' thinking may be common in vulnerable children's narratives. All expressed uncertainty – 'a hopefulness and

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[9] The study comprised an initial sample of 113 'repeat offenders' in Sheffield, followed over 3-4 years (with 78% of the sample involved the third and fourth interviews. Interview recordings were available, transcribed and analysed for a 'qualitative sub-sample' totalling 18 men (Shapland and Bottoms, 2016: 99-103).

[10] This term understands maturation as a combination of changes at the psychological/ neurodevelopmental and socio-structural level. Thus, psychological maturational changes might include increases in cognitive maturity, consequential thinking, reduced risk taking and consideration of other perspectives. Socio-structural maturation encompasses changing social roles, such as leaving school, becoming financially independent, entering into serious relationships (Bateman, 2020).

hopelessness' - – about the likelihood of realising their idealised future plans, shaped by previous experiences of powerlessness, victimisation and instability. Moreover, they often employed protective mechanisms for dealing with the potential threat of disappointment, including the portrayal of oneself as ambivalent about the future (2015: 175-7). Bateman et al.'s (2013: 67-71) study involving interviews with 16 girls (aged 17 years) detained in a Young Offender Institution in England and Wales made similar findings, further suggesting that the nature of youth justice intervention appeared to be an important determinant of the girls' sense of optimism and agency.

There is an evident tension here between the messages from desistance research about the importance of nurturing individuals' personal agency and the age-based constraints experienced by children in exercising it. There is a potential danger that in seeking to develop children's agency, children become unjustly responsibilised for their ability to free themselves from offending, due to a lack of support with changing their lives, as identified by Phoenix and Kelly's research (2013). In recognition of children's constrained agency, Haines and Case (2015: 76-79) argue for the responsibilisation of adults, rather than children. As they explain:

> There is much about the lives of children that is the responsibility of adults. Children are not given the full social responsibilities of adulthood; it is wrong to invoke this responsibility when and if they come into conflict with the law and the youth justice system. Adults, on the other hand, must (fully) accept their responsibilities towards children (2015: 76).

This idea is likely to be instructive when applying desistance approaches with children.

Points for practice:

- **Research suggests the crucial importance of professionals actively *supporting* the self-determination and hope of children through future-focused work to develop strengths and opportunities.**

- **In supporting children to develop a sense of agency, practitioners should be mindful of the constraints children may experience in exercising it, including those related to age, as well as their individual and social circumstances.**

- **To protect against the dangers of responsibilising children for their ability to move away from offending, practice should be guided by the notion of adult responsibility to support children to overcome constraints and obstacles to change.**

Identity

Research with this age group also suggests that, as with adults, identity plays some role, with negative self-concept associated with engagement in offending and positive identity development often linked to desistance (McMahon and Jump, 2018; Johns et al., 2017; Beyond Youth Custody, 2017; Nugent and Barnes, 2013). For example, the desisters in McMahon and Jump's (2018: 9) study 'explicitly discussed shedding "offending identities" and developing new, prosocial non-criminal identities', although the sample was very small (6 people). However, research with young custody-leavers aged between 14 and 25 found mixed evidence for the role of identity change in their desistance journeys: while a minority described a clear shift in their sense of self; many provided contradictory accounts of a changed identity and were 'resistant' to such interpretations, instead emphasising the role of agency; and it was absent from others' responses (Beyond Youth Custody, 2017: 18-23). Yet participants often referenced a crystallisation of discontent and imagined future selves (Paternoster and

Bushway, 2009) in stopping offending, suggesting that cognitive change played some role (Beyond Youth Custody, 2017: 18-23). Although it is difficult to draw firm conclusions from the research owing to the methods used,[11] it nevertheless raises questions about the role and nature of identity shifts for desisting adolescents. Given that 'research has long indicated that crystallisation of identity (e.g. discovering "one's true self") is part of the maturation process and transition to adulthood' (Rocque, 2015: 350) it may be that some adolescents experience any cognitive shifts associated with desistance as part of the process of becoming who they are, rather than a significant departure from their old self (for a similar argument, see Case and Haines, 2020).

Going further, Wigzell's (2020) study of youth justice supervision and the supervisory relationship in England, involving 26 children undertaking court-ordered community sentences,[12] found that the notion of identity change appeared irrelevant to many of the children, most of whom had little, if any, prior recorded criminal behaviour and whose offending history was short, sporadic or accidental. Pointing to evidence that this is a growing national trend amongst children on court-ordered sentences (73 per cent of children on community orders are either first time entrants [40 per cent] or have 1-2 previous cautions or convictions [33 per cent] [YJB/ MoJ, 2020: 10.9]), she argues that this may have important implications for the applicability of desistance-related theories centred on narrative/ identity change to children who offend. Wigzell (2020) emphasizes the need for caution over assumptions that all children in the youth justice system have pro-criminal identities that need to be *changed*, since they risk doing more harm than good; particularly if they are deficit-focused and stigmatising. Such approaches make an implicit concession to risk-based thinking, assuming that a child's offending is indicative of 'pro-criminal' thinking or attitudes. The danger is that supervision (and wider criminal justice contact) may destabilise children's self-identity or reinforce doubts about self-worth, particularly given evidence that adolescence is a period of malleability (Nugent and McNeill, 2017) and they may accordingly be more susceptible to the potential labelling effects of the criminal justice system (McAra and McVie, 2007; Robinson, 2016).

Points for practice

- **The principal task for youth justice services with regards to identity is to recognise and nurture children's existing, possibly faltering, pro-social self-identity (without condoning their misbehaviour), rather than seeking to change it.**

Relationships

As with research with adults, a number of small-scale studies have identified the importance of positive worker – client relationships in children's engagement with criminal justice services and their movement away from offending. Phoenix and Kelly (2013) found that for the 29 youth justice-involved children in their study, their perception of whether or not their YOT

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[11] The research was conducted as part of Beyond Youth Custody, a five-year project designed to improve knowledge and practice of resettlement for young people after release from custody through a multi-dimensional programme of research, dissemination and policy-influencing activities. This included involvement with 15 voluntary sector projects who were supporting young custody leavers to collect data on resettlement implementation and effectiveness. Although a general overview of methods is provided (e.g. 'more than 200 site visits and… a similar number of staff and stakeholder interviews'), there is a lack of detail e.g. regarding the number of young interviewees, and how desistance was defined (2017: 15-16).

[12] The study also involved interviews with 46 youth justice practitioners across two youth offending services, and extensive participant observation.

worker cared was the key determinant of their engagement with supervision. Johns et al. (2017: 18) reported that the provision of support through a trusting supervisory relationship with their youth offending team officer was perceived by some of the 12 young people in their research as the central factor in their movement away from crime, although intimate relationships and having a family were the 'biggest motivator'. Likewise, some of those in Gray's (2013: 34) seven-year follow-up study of nine recipients of Intensive Supervision and Surveillance (ISSP) said that the bond with their worker was 'the important factor' in their compliance and subsequent desistance. Interviews with young people in and leaving custody suggests that workers who are understood to genuinely care can 'spark hope' (Nugent, 2015: 281[13]) through 'fostering a sense of empowerment and militating against a fatalistic outlook' (Bateman et al., 2013: 77[14]).

There is some evidence too that certain elements of the supervisory relationship have particular resonance for young people. In her study of probation, Rex found that advice and encouragement provided by probation officers 'appeared to have particular resonance for young recidivists' (those aged 20 years and under) (Rex, 1999: 375). Similarly, Trotter (1999) found that the pro-social modelling approach was most effective with *young*, high-risk children in the justice system (as cited in McNeill, 2003: 154). Rex also, notably, found that younger men's needs differed from older probationers in that they required practical help, rather than advice to solve difficulties themselves (Rex, 1999: 374). McNeill (2003:159) asserts that the supervisory relationship may be particularly important for young men involved with their peers in offending, given the shifting nature of their commitment to desistance. More recently, Wigzell (2020) found that the youth justice supervisory relationships with the *most powerful helping potential* were those premised on *human boundaries,* insofar as they necessitated professional engagement that went beyond the supervisory role, and *reciprocity,* characterised by a mutual attachment of care and communication. She argues that to maximise the helping potential of relationships, youth justice services need to invest in their development and maintenance through relationship-focused training and independent clinical supervision for practitioners.

Points for practice:

- **Development of trusting relationships of care that can support and empower children to achieve positive outcomes should be of primary importance for practitioners. Youth justice services have a key role to play in encouraging and enabling such relationships, through training and support for practitioners.**

Desistance in youth justice policy and practice?

Despite the interest in desistance thinking in youth justice in recent years, evidence suggests that it remains insufficiently understood and embedded in practice and policy. Several recent thematic inspections have found that youth justice professionals lack knowledge of desistance (HMI Probation, 2016) and struggle to translate it into their practice (HMI Probation, 2016;

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[13] Nugent's (2015: 272-3) research study comprised repeated interviews for up to 4 years with 52 young men (aged 16-21 years) involved with a post-custody support service, as well as quantitative analysis of the men's criminal backgrounds.

[14] Bateman et al.'s (2013: 23) study involved interviews with 16 girls (aged 17 years) detained in a Young Offender Institution in England and Wales, and follow-up interviews with two of the girls after their release.

Criminal Justice Joint Inspectorates, 2018).[15] This was also the finding of Hampson's (2018) small-scale study of desistance implementation in youth justice in Wales. Of particular note, her analysis of Assetplus assessments (n = 14) across three YOT areas found that notwithstanding the desistance basis of the new tool, intervention plans remained 'very negative' in character, centred on offence-focused work and lacking meaningful activity on goals and opportunities (2018: 27). Linked to this, participants identified barriers to putting their desistance knowledge into practice, including mixed support amongst middle managers, and a lack of understanding amongst YOT Management Boards and magistrates.

It is clear that 'mixed messages' (Hampson, 2018: 30) from inspectorates about the place of desistance in practice is an important obstacle here. Hampson (2018) notes that 'desistance' was only mentioned twice across the 20 YOT inspections undertaken following publication of its thematic inspection of desistance-based practice in May 2016, with attention centred on risk and offending-behaviour work. While there have been increasing references in more recent inspection reports, 'risk' remains the watchword, outnumbering 'desistance' by an average of two to one.[16] However, desistance often appears to be used as a synonym for 'reducing offending' (a typical phrase being 'the implementation and delivery of services to support desistance were done well'). Notably this was a criticism HMI Probation made of practitioners in its thematic inspection (2016: 37). Scant detail is provided as to *what* YOTs are actually doing to support desistance, we are just informed that they are doing it. Moreover, there continue to be relatively few references to desistance-inspired approaches. For example, both 'relationships' with young people and 'strengths' are mentioned an average of just 6 times in recent inspection reports.[17] As Hampson (2018: 30) asks: 'how can they pursue a desistance-based agenda if the criteria upon which they will be judged by the inspectorate is still (for general inspections) firmly risk-focused?'.

Gray and Smith (2019) note that this is exacerbated by the focus on offence-related factors (such as offence history) in decision-making about disposals for children. Moreover, a reading of YOT case management guidance (although this is currently under revision)[18] shows that desistance-based approaches appear to be simultaneously side-lined by and conflated with offence-focused work, such as cognitive behavioural approaches:

> *For children with a lower level of support required for desistance, interventions are likely to focus on giving information, building on existing positives in their lives, building confidence to resist peer pressure and encouraging pro-social attitudes, values and relationships. For children assessed as having a medium, high or very high level of desistance support, a cognitive-behavioural approach is likely to be of use, to address the thinking skills, values and attitudes which have contributed to offending* (YJB, 2019b: no page).

A further obstacle is the lack of a consistent and comprehensive conceptualisation of desistance-based youth justice practice across the inspectorates and Assetplus/ the YJB (or

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[15] Feedback from Hampson's delivery of training on 'desistance approaches in youth justice' (comprising analysis of 182 evaluation forms) showed that practitioners typically rated their baseline/prior understanding of desistance as mediocre, with nearly half of respondents saying that they knew little/ very little.

[16] For example, analysis of the four YOT inspection reports published in the final quarter of 2019 found that risk was mentioned an average of 63 times, compared to 31 times for desistance. Analysis of the frequency with which terms were used excluded references made in the glossary and in the headings. The four reports were inspections of Brent, Croydon, Leicester City and Le YOS s (HMI Probation, 2019b).

[17] This relates to the four inspection reports of youth offending services published in the last quarter of 2019, as detailed in the above footnote.

[18] It should be noted that while the guidance is currently being revised, in the interim period practitioners continue to be referred to the version described here.

indeed any accessible youth-specific overview for the curious practitioner). As Hampson (2018: 30) has pointed out, these entities 'stress different aspects of desistance, to the expense of others', with the Inspectorate's thematic heavily focusing on the importance of the worker – child relationship but paying little attention to strength-based work and the reverse being true of Assetplus. Hampson is critical too of the lack of attention given by either to the importance of the development of a non-offending narrative, given the basis for this from the desistance literature (2018: 30). (Although the YJB has recently begun to address this in its entreaty in the new national standards to 'Build on children's individual strengths and capabilities as *a means of developing a pro-social identity for sustainable desistance from crime'* [MoJ/ YJB, 2019: 12]). Yet, what is perhaps more surprising is that neither the Inspectorate nor the YJB appears to have considered the distinct questions raised by applying desistance thinking with under-18s, given that the research evidence on which it is based predominantly relates to adults. One caveat to this is the YJB's (2018) *Constructive Resettlement* approach, outlined in an eponymous document, which draws explicitly on the *Beyond Youth Custody* research evidence and makes links with the desistance literature, acknowledging the adult-focus of the latter. The document centres on the idea that the key goal for agencies is to support the child's identity shift; while intended for resettlement services, readers are invited to consider its application more widely in their youth justice work (YJB, 2018: 3). Yet, as noted above, there are remaining uncertainties as to the role of identity change in desistance amongst children, in relation to which caution must be exercised.

What this makes clear is that a 'sea-change' in youth justice is required - in inspection criteria, YOT management and training approaches - if desistance thinking is to become embedded in policy and practice (Hampson, 2018: 31). However, this leads to the question of whether this would be desirable. Is a desistance-based approach the best for children in conflict with the law?

● **Child-first desistance?**

On the face of it, desistance feels like a more ethical, and effective approach to working with children within the youth justice system, especially against a backdrop of a protracted risk-focus. Yet there are problems with this way of working too.

A key source of critique is that while the approach is premised on working with the whole person (rather than on offending-related need), it remains *principally* focused on reducing offending (Johns et al, 2017; Nugent and Barnes, 2013). As the NAYJ stated in its recent manifesto for a child-friendly youth justice system: 'The purpose of any compulsory interventions should be to promote the child's wellbeing, education and longer-term healthy development' (2019: 6). Thus, Nugent and Barnes (2013), despite recognising the value of the desistance paradigm, caution against allowing it to become a driver of policy with children who offend because it 'arguably lends itself too readily to practice becoming merely crisis management, and at worst complacency' (2013: 23). For them, the approach is 'not good enough', promoting a narrow and unambitious focus on reducing offending, rather than universal positive outcomes. (Although, the Good Lives Model, which foregrounds the promotion of 'offender' well-being [Ward, 2010], could be argued to ameliorate some of these criticisms.) They argue too that the valorisation of desistance thinking encourages intervention at the point of crisis, when a child has been labelled as a troublemaker or offender, and overlooks the social justice context of children's offending. Building on this latter point, Gray and Smith (2019) contend that desistance thinking as applied in youth justice perpetuates many of the same flaws as the RFPP approaches insofar as they centre efforts on changing the

individual, neglecting the crucial importance of addressing underlying structural factors. As they argue (2019: 580):

> …*the structural constraints that block young people's pathways out of crime are minimised because, while both the RFPP and desistance theory recognise the social context of offending, they seek solutions through correcting "individual" deficits and/or building individual strengths.*

Seen in this light, desistance approaches seem to fall short of the 'Child First' ethos, which has been embraced by the Youth Justice Board in recent years. The Child First approach was first advocated over 20-years ago by Haines and Drakeford (1998), with the latest iteration articulated in the positive youth justice model developed by Haines and Case (2015), of which the key tenets include:[19]

- Treatment of under-18s in conflict with the law *primarily as children* (rather than offenders) and responses to the *whole child* (rather than only offending behaviour), with the according need for youth justice approaches to be embedded in universal support;

- *Child-specific* (not adulterized) responses to offending.

- *Diversionary* responses from formal youth justice processes that enhance access to universal services and promote positive outcomes; including privileging diversion over welfare-based responses, which they view as undermining children's agency and rights, as well as pathologizing.

- *Promotion* of positive behaviours and outcomes, rather than offence, offender-focused and risk-orientated approaches;

- Approaches that are *legitimate* to children (rather than stigmatising), fostered through participation and meaningful engagement.

- *Responsibilisation* of adults for children's outcomes (rather than children) and grounded in children's rights, with the central ambition of promoting maximum outcomes (rather than minimum standards) for all children (2015: 46-80).

How can desistance approaches be child first if they are primarily focused on reducing offending? The YJB is yet to address this question. At present it is difficult to argue that the desistance work as currently implemented in youth justice is aligned with such principles. Yet we believe that if the lessons from desistance research were applied through a child first lens, with broader aims (beyond reduced offending), alongside work to address structural barriers, such an approach could make a meaningful and positive difference to children's lives. This would involve not only a much greater emphasis on approaches that foster children's strengths across all parts of the youth justice system, but proactive work to provide opportunities to put these into practice and overcome the obstacles to doing so. This is not an easy task.

As a first step, the YJB needs to reflect more explicitly on its own thinking on child first approaches. In particular, the YJB's interpretation and implementation of the child first

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[19] It should be noted that there are three other tenets of the model. These are: the need for the evidence-based academic-practice partnership, rather than programme fetishism that takes a 'one-size-fits-all' approach; systems management, 'which views the YJS as an interconnected, mutually reinforcing series of decision- making points' (2015: 71); and critical partnership with the state, rather than distrustful. While acknowledging Haines and Case's (2015: 61) point that their model is 'not a buffet-style menu where one is free to choose the tasty morsels, leaving some dishes untouched', we do not discuss these aspects of the model further here since they are not critical to the discussion.

approach gives mixed messages on the priority attached to reducing offending. The new national standards published in 2019 suggest an interest in promoting positive outcomes more broadly, articulating a modified aim of the system as 'to enable children to live a safe, crime-free life and *make a positive contribution to society*' (MoJ/YJB, 2019: 5; own emphasis). This is reflected in its iteration of child first principles:

1   *Prioritise the best interests of children, recognising their needs, capacities, rights and potential.*

2   *Build on children's individual strengths and capabilities as a means of developing a pro-social identity for sustainable desistance from crime. This leads to safer communities and fewer victims. All work is constructive and future-focused, built on supportive relationships that empower children to fulfil their potential and make positive contributions to society.*

3   *Encourage children's active participation, engagement and wider social inclusion. All work is a meaningful collaboration with children and their carers.*

4   *Promote a childhood removed from the justice system, using prevention, diversion and minimal intervention. All work minimises criminogenic stigma from contact with the system.* (MoJ/YJB, 2019: 12)

Yet, despite the implication that advancing children's overall well-being should be a key concern of youth justice agencies, much of this is framed as an instrumental good in the standards; that is, for 'sustainable desistance from crime' to result in 'safe communities and fewer victims' (MoJ/YJB, 2019: 6). Likewise, the YOT case management guidance asserts upfront that 'the focus of your work is to prevent offending and reoffending...[and] respond effectively to the risks and needs of children in the youth justice system' (YJB, 2019b). The overwhelming concern is 'reducing the risk of reoffending... [which should be] cited as the priority task on each [intervention] plan' (YJB, 2019b). Although this guidance is currently being revised with a view to better aligning it with child first principles, at the time of writing, this is what practitioners are exhorted to work to. Thus, at present, there is evidence that meeting the wider needs of children continues to be 'subsumed within the aim of reforming them' (Smith, 2014: 77).

It is clear that if the child first philosophy is to be genuinely implemented, the Youth Justice Board needs to go further in emphasising the importance of a *whole child* approach, prioritising the promotion of positive behaviour and outcomes beyond reduced offending. This message needs to be consistent across YJB guidance and communication. Moreover, it is critical that it is shared by other stakeholders at a national and local level, from inspectorates to YOT management boards. Importantly, deep thought needs to be given to how support can be broadened to focus beyond individual change, doing much more to address the structural issues that increase the likelihood of pathways into offending and preclude escape from it.

This is likely to raise difficult questions about the organisation of youth justice. One obvious issue relates to notions of effectiveness and measurement. NAYJ argues that:

Short term reoffending metrics are inadequate, and inappropriate, measures of the effectiveness of youth justice intervention whose efficacy should be evaluated by longer term developmental, and educational, outcomes and the promotion of children's wellbeing (2019: 3)*.*

If preventing offending and managing risk remain the modus operandi of the system, with the according performance measurement and inspection focus, there is a danger that practice will inevitably be orientated towards these goals, regardless of child first aspirations. Haines and

Case (2015) recommend the development of positive outcome measures.[20] But what would these be, how could they be captured without increasing the administrative burden on practitioners, and how could they be equally valued in an arena that continues to prioritise risk and preventing offending? Recent scholarship on this topic has outlined several possible ways forward. Writing on the subject of better capturing the effectiveness of probation, Wong (2019) has suggested three alternative forms of measurement, which together provide a proxy measure for desistance:

- **Client engagement with services** – in line with evidence that individuals who comply are more likely to desist;
- **Changes in the client's needs through service involvement** (both criminogenic and non-criminogenic; i.e. those assessed as directly related to the individual's offending and those which are not); and
- **Changes in well-being and agency** – for example, through the Intermediate Outcomes Measurement Instrument (IOMI), whose development was sponsored by the Ministry of Justice/ Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service. The validated tool considers changes across seven dimensions (resilience; well-being; agency/self-efficacy; impulsivity; motivation to change; hope; and interpersonal trust) (adapted from Wong, 2019: 6-7).

Yet, as Wong acknowledges, such measures carry their own limitations. For example, case management data typically can only capture information on individuals' formal compliance with services (e.g. whether they attended or not) rather than substantive compliance (their active engagement), which is understood as significant for desistance (Robinson and McNeill, 2008). Furthermore, individuals' difficulties with attendance or disengagement from services may be unrelated to offending (e.g. transportation costs, or because they no longer need support) and thus are imperfect proxies of desistance progress. An additional limitation not mentioned is that client's assessed needs may increase during the course of supervision due to professionals' heightened awareness and understanding of the individual. Wong notes that these issues underline the importance of listening to user voices about reasons for non-engagement, arguing that any probation outcome measures should be *co-produced* (2019: 8-9).

Likewise, in their articulation of a holistic model of outcome measurement for youth justice, focused on youth custody, Paterson-Young et al. (2019: 39) emphasise the centrality of young people's perspectives in their development. For the authors, this is a means by which young people can be empowered to overcome existing power imbalances, through ensuring that service design and outcome measurement, as well as wider discourses of youth offending are more reflective of their needs and experiences. They outline an impressive, theoretically and empirically-grounded model for outcome measurement, comprising several steps. First, their 'Young-Person Centred Theory-Led Social Impact Measurement Framework for Youth Offending' provides the starting point for assessing impact in youth justice services (Paterson-Young et al., 2019: 40). At a basic level, this draws on Farrington's (2005) Integrated Cognitive-Antisocial Potential (ICAP) Theory,[21] desistance theories and, social impact measurement theory to develop a theory of change for intervention based on the economic, relational and

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[20] As an example of such a measure, they cite PLATE (perceived level of access to entitlements), used by the Welsh Government to assess whether provision is meeting children's needs, with lower PLATE indicative of negative outcomes and higher plate indicative of positive outcomes (2015: 267-8).

[21] ICAP theory specifies the risk and protective factors that influence the development of long-term antisocial potential (which varies between individuals); the situational factors that influence short-term antisocial potential (which changes in individuals of time) as well as the cognitive processes that translate such potential into criminal behaviour (Farrington, 2014).

psychological factors that may influence reoffending,[22] which provide the basis for identifying the measurable outputs, outcomes and impacts (Paterson-Young et al., 2019: 40).[23] Second, in recognition of the importance of grounding outcome-measurement in young people's experiences, Paterson-Young et al. (2019) gathered data[24] from young people and staff in a Secure Training Centre (STC) about the factors that influence offending behaviour before, during and post-custody, identifying four key areas: health and well-being; relationships; education; and independence and attitudes to offending. Third, the framework and research data are combined to form the Resettlement Pyramid, which outlines the 'crucial building blocks' to successful transition out of custody (aligned with the above areas), and is underpinned by specific factors for measurement (e.g. trust is one indicator for relationships, measured through self-reported views on relationships) (2019: 142-4). Although their outcome measurement model is designed for young people in STCs, it is easy to see how their approach could be used to develop holistic outcome measures for other youth justice interventions, such as community services.

A second issue concerns the configuration of youth justice. Haines and Case's (2015: 31) child first paradigm expressly provides parameters for practice, rather than prescription, in recognition (rightly so) of the differing localised contexts. Yet, if we are asking practitioners to respond to the *whole child,* moving beyond offence- and offender-focused support, we surely must question the appropriateness of a YOT model that typically works through a justice lens (although, this is not to cast doubt on the need for a specialist workforce with children in conflict with the law, which arguably has significant advantages for this often marginalised group). This was the premise of the proposals made by Charlie Taylor in his youth justice review in 2016 for the Ministry of Justice. Crucially, he recommended that the government both remove the ring-fence around funding to be spent on youth justice services and the statutory duty to have a YOT (specified in the Crime and Disorder Act 1998), replacing this with a statutory duty for multi-agency collaboration (Taylor, 2016). Looking to current adaptions of the YOT model, he imagined a system in which services for children who offend are integrated within mainstream youth support or children's services and entitled to the same spectrum of provision, reflecting their 'children first' status. NAYJ expressed concern that such relaxation of provisions 'should not undermine the statutory responsibilities of local authorities and partner agencies to children in trouble with the law' (2016: 5). Ultimately the Ministry of Justice rejected Taylor's recommendations, although it made a commitment to exploring how YOTs could be given greater flexibility to improve the delivery of youth justice. Yet it is disappointing that the opportunity has not been taken to use the spirit of his proposals as a starting point for debate about whether and, if so, how youth justice could be better designed to reflect the whole child. Children's experiences and views, as well as the diversity of professionals who work with children (reflecting their existence as a 'whole child' rather than solely a child who offends), must be at the heart of any such dialogue.

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[22] Economic (e.g. low income, unemployment), relational (e.g. parental and peer criminality), and psychological (e.g. impact of family breakdown) (Paterson-Young et al., 2019: 40).

[23] *Outcomes* are changes that occur in the individual during the intervention, whereas *impacts* are changes arising that can be attributed to the intervention (Clifford et al. 2016: 6; cited in Paterson-Young et al., 2019: 34). For example, a child may stop offending (outcome) but attribute this to a new partner rather than the intervention.

[24] This comprised questionnaires completed by 68 young people and 74 staff, and interviews with 15 young people and 15 staff (Paterson-Young et al., 2019: 2).

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