

LOST IN TRANSITION: Exploring young people's experiences of transition from youth detention in the ACT

Executive Summary

Institute of Child Protection Studies, ACU

2008

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December 2008

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Project Team

This research project was conducted by the Institute of Child Protection Studies (ICPS) at the Australian Catholic University with funding from the ACT Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services. The ICPS was established in 2005 to promote and enhance the safety of children, young people and families through quality research, training and community education. Driven by a child-centred philosophy, the Institute is committed to ensuring that children and young people remain at the centre of social policy and practice and work with governments and services to promote their interests and well-being.

The project team consisted of: Tim Moore, Morag McArthur and Vicky Saunders with assistance from Lorraine Thomson (ICPS) and Tracy Cussen (DHCS).

Acknowledgements

The Institute of Child Protection Studies (ICPS) would like to thank the following people and organisations for assisting in the development of this research project:

- Members of the project's steering committee – Paul Wyles, Emilija Balog, Matthew Kennedy, Ronia McDade, Frank Smith, Sarah Hordern, Fiona McGregor and Michael Reid - and Tracy Cussen and Dr Sue Robinson who assisted in its development
- Staff from Youth Justice, particularly Leonie McKenna and Tracy Uhle (from Quamby Youth Detention Centre) and Ronia McDade and her team (from Community Youth Justice)
- Parents and those workers young people identified as being important to them who participated in interviews and focus groups
- Government and non-government services who participated in focus groups

This project would not have been possible without the generosity, wisdom and courage of the twelve young people involved. Over the course of 18 months, these young people shared their stories, which were often filled with regret, frustration and disappointment but also with hope and determination. Through them we developed a picture about the challenges and opportunities that face young people involved in the juvenile justice system and for those who attempt to support them. It is hoped that this report will shed some light on their experiences and lead to greater understanding and support.

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1. Introduction

In 2007-8, the Institute of Child Protection Studies at Australian Catholic University (ICPS) conducted a research project for the ACT Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services (DHCS) that attempted to develop a better understanding of the experiences of young people transitioning through the youth justice system.

This study attempts to develop an understanding of the way that young people experience detention, their transitions back into the community and the ways that the system may achieve better outcomes at each stage of their reintegration. Ultimately, it attempts to answer the key research questions:

- **How do young people experience the transition from detention back to the community?**
 - **What are the challenges that limit the success of their reintegration?**
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The project drew upon a small number of projects focusing on young people's transitions in Australia and the broader 'what works' literature, now influential in most jurisdictions internationally. These bodies of research suggest that although juvenile detention has only a minimal positive impact when provided in isolation, when provided alongside programs that enable positive reintegration, rates of recidivism can be reduced and sustainable outcomes achieved.

2. An overview of the project

Cohort

This study focused on young people who were incarcerated on a committal order at ACT's secure youth facility, Quamby Youth Detention Centre (Quamby) and tracked 11 young people over an 18 month period. During this time, young people were interviewed within the facility and, where possible, back in the community. Young people were invited to identify a family member and / or someone who they believed could help reflect on their experiences within the system. These key people were also interviewed about the specific

experiences while workers from other services working with young people at Quamby participated in a series of workshops and focus groups.

The cohort included nine boys and two girls aged between 16 and 18 at the time of their first interview who were incarcerated on a committal between 2006 and 2008. Of the sample, four young people identified as being Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander and three from a culturally or linguistically diverse background.

Nature of young people's lives

Over half of the young people had lives that were characterised by chaos and instability from an early age. These young people had family members who had their own alcohol or other drug problems, who were engaged in criminal behaviour, who were unable to provide children with safe, stable and positive home environments. By late primary school these young people had begun to drop out of education, drink heavily and commit petty offences. Some of these young people had parents who tried to protect their children from the negative influences in their home environments while others failed to do so. Most had some involvement with Care and Protection services, with at least four spending some time in Out of Home Care. These young people began to appear before the courts around the age of 12 and the experienced constant recycling through the juvenile justice system – escalating their crimes from petty theft and misdemeanours to car thefts and aggravated assaults. Each time they exited Quamby they failed to develop strong connections with schools, positive peers or support networks and often returned within 12 months of release. One young person had been remanded at Quamby 15 times before being interviewed for this project.

Other young people lived in homes that were more stable and in families where risk-taking was not condoned or seen as normal. But most of these young people dropped out of school early, hung with groups of offending peers and began using drugs and alcohol before they turned 15. Like their peers, their risk-taking often began with small misadventures (such as truancy) but got more involved as their social groups stepped up their behaviours. They reported that their parents were often unaware of what they were doing or were unable to manage them in any effective way. Each had been remanded to Quamby at least three times prior to being involved in this project, for similar reasons as those in the first group: for aggravated burglaries and car theft. Although these young people were more

likely to be involved in 'normal' and positive activities outside of their criminal behaviour, once incarcerated they were less likely to reconnect to positive peers or lifestyles. Adopting negative labels, young people often felt more connected to peers that they had met inside and the scene into which they had become entrenched.

Although there was evidence that various parts of the service system had attempted to make some contact with young people and families, they remained disconnected from both formal and informal support networks from an early age. These young people sometimes had tacit relationships with positive adults but did not turn to them for advice or guidance and did not identify them when asked how they dealt with challenges.

Over the eighteen months of this project, only three young people spent any significant time outside of the justice system. This group said that they enjoyed the support of their families, were being helped by strong friendship groups and were actively looking for work. Two felt that the involvement of a worker who spent considerable time with them had helped their success. All three believed that they had 'given up' on their criminal lives and had taken positive steps in disconnecting themselves from people and places that might distract them from their goal: of staying outside the system and getting on with their lives.

The majority of young people, however, reoffended or were remanded for breaching their orders after serving their committals. Two young people were incarcerated in other jurisdictions, two went 'on the run' and two were committed to an adult facility. These young people talked about how they had 'stuffed up' this time but believed that things would be different when they were next released.

Methodology

The project was designed in a way that reflected the Institute's views about youth participation and justice. Young people were seen as active partners in the research project and had opportunities to help shape the discussions. Interviews were conducted in a way that attempted to reduce power imbalances, to allow young people to explore issues of importance to them in ways that they felt comfortable and in a process that we hoped would positively affect young people and the broader system. This is in contrast to many popular responses to young offenders which problematise their experiences and discredit their views.

As part of the research process, the Institute sought and obtained ethics approval from Australian Catholic University's Human Research Ethics Committee.

As this is a small group of well known young people it was important to protect their identities as much as possible while ensuring that the true essence of their stories remained. We informed participants that we could not fully protect their identity and that when reading this report staff of Quamby or others may attribute particular quotes or stories to them. They were therefore encouraged to consider the implications of sharing certain information.

We have de-identified young people and on occasion, deleted or modified certain information, such as the nature of the crime or their family backgrounds that does not detract from the young person's story but attempts, instead, to protect their identity. As there were only two young women in this study we have also disguised their identity by referring to all participants as young men.

We adopted a particular view of justice which recognises both the vulnerability of young people but also their capacity to change. The project was based upon the view that young people's engagement with the youth justice system needed to focus not on punishment but instead on rehabilitation and that it was the role of the broader service system and community to work together with young people to assist their positive reintegration.

3. Key emerging themes:

Families

Young people most often identified their families as being protective in nature: offering them stability, support and encouragement prior to, during and after their periods of incarceration. Families were sometimes the only people to visit young people while detained, they often helped to organise education and employment and to monitor young people's progress when returning to the community. Although this sometimes presented both parents and children with a number of challenges (conflict often occurred when the role that families were expected to play in breaching young people was not clarified, for example), young people valued this assistance, particularly when other parts of their support system broke down:

*Seeing your family is number one. Hectically. Fair enough your friends can't come in because of the rules and stuff. But when you're family doesn't come in, it really f**kin brings you down. I'm saying when the family comes, it's really cool. Everyone gets really excited for you. They're like 'yeah yeah yeah, mad, mad, I wish my Mum'd come in'. We encourage each other. It's good like that.*

Although identified as protective, young people in this cohort most often lived in families with multiple risks and challenges. Family poverty, conflict and breakdown were prevalent in a number of the families and appeared to play a role in young people's involvement with risk-taking peers and their eventual criminality:

When I robbed the taxi with my brother my family [had] started to fall apart. My sisters got put in Family Services and stuff like that. That's when I went and did the taxi. I think that played a big part in it. I was just so upset and that... I went 'screw it all'

At least five of the young people also lived in families where a relative was using drugs or alcohol, were participating in criminal behaviour and / or a series of other antisocial behaviours. It would appear that because they had been exposed to these behaviours from an early age, young people often normalised them and, in some cases, participated in them with their older relatives. Although young people were reluctant to use these problems as an excuse for their behaviours, they did note that these environments influenced their early criminality and made it difficult to desist crime post-release when surrounded by these ongoing risks. This was particularly the case when participation in these activities was something that the family had in common.

It was just part of our family, everyone was getting into it. It wasn't like we were all doing it together all the time, its just that you don't see it as a big thing like other kids do. It was just what happened in our family

Having a child who is involved in criminal activities and is then incarcerated places significant stress on families and can lead to a number of negative affects. Families talked about how this stress often led to family conflict, tense relationships (between the young person and their family but also amongst other family members), and feelings of shame and exclusion.

For a long time it's been a strain on our marriage. My partner isn't that supportive. A long time ago [my husband] took his hands off the wheel. He can't do this.

Generally, families were disengaged from the youth justice system either because their own internal problems prevented full engagement or because the system did not enable them to be actively involved in their children's lives nor the decision-making processes that surrounded them. This was disappointing for many, particularly because it was families who provided the only ongoing support to young people and often took up the responsibility for them on release. With little involvement, assistance or communication, families were often ill-equipped to assist their child's reintegration into the community and often breakdown occurred post release. The challenges for culturally diverse families appeared to be particularly prominent.

We would be the one actively seeking contact, we would be phoning up Quamby. I don't think they ever called us. We don't know what went on. They might have said ring your mum and dad. We just don't know what went on inside.

It would seem that more inclusive family-focused assistance is required prior to young people's engagement with the justice system and throughout their involvement within it. Better assessment of the risks and protective factors influencing young people and their families may help the provision of preventative and early intervention focused supports that are responsive and realistic. This is particularly the case for young people transitioning back into families who are using drugs, participating in crime or experiencing significant conflict and breakdown.

The systemic challenges that families face in maintaining contact with young people and in meaningfully engaging with the system must also be addressed: policies need to be reoriented to ensuring that families are supported to support their children while cultures that problematise their involvement should be challenged. Assistance that helps families to prepare for their child's return and new strategies for best supporting them would be of benefit as would family counselling and mediation.

Peers:

Peers play a significant part in the lives of young people and can both encourage them or dissuade them from engaging in problematic behaviours. It would appear that peers are not

seen as a potential resource by the system but, instead, primarily as a threat. However, young people valued their friendships, their sense of belonging and the support that they received from their friends both within and external to the system.

Most young people had limited peer networks from their early adolescence onwards, with most of their peer groups participating in antisocial activities. This was a problem because young people felt that to belong they needed to participate in crime and drug-taking and to advance their behaviours to remain connected.

I just caught up with mates and that too. Just friends and like, we were all from Queanbeyan and we were living up there and all our friends were getting into the shit and we just tag along wiv em and get caught up in it too

While incarcerated, young people had little interaction with positive peers from the outside. However, they developed and maintained some supportive relationships with other inmates which they saw as being invaluable.

In a way, if these guys don't support each other it's not bad. But it's real good when you do, you know. Watch out for each other and that... Having mates you can hang with, rely on – that's important

They believed that such relationships could be better fostered and that programs that maximised young people working and learning together could be helpful.

Some of us could go and talk to 'em out there and they'd listen. Like you don't go to 'em and say "do that, do that". You say "we'll help you if you do this and do that and that. We tell em to go to school. Go to footy and do stuff right

After leaving Quamby, young people who were linked up with 'normal' activities (such as sports, volunteering and employment) enjoyed meeting and receiving support from peers who challenged their behaviours, encouraged their progress and helped fill the hours in which they might otherwise get involved in criminal activity. Although formal interactions (with workers and other young people involved in youth programs) was valued, developing normalising relationships was particularly helpful for young people – particularly as young people needed to be able to replace old peer networks before they felt they could completely disengage from them. Supporting positive peers to assist young people after

leaving the Centre was seen as helpful and may be supported and reinforced by services post-release.

I reckon you need to have friends that are supportive but friends that you can have fun with too. Friends that actually go out and do stuff, fun stuff. I wasn't 18 when I got out but it was good to have friends that were older that could come over to my house and hang out, have a few beers, but keep you out of trouble, you know what I mean? You gotta have friends like that... let you do stuff that your parents won't let you do – but stuff that's OK – not crime or bad stuff, but good stuff

Young people felt that they needed to develop strategies for managing old relationships: for maximising on the positive aspects of these friendships, for dealing with pressure and for cutting themselves off from unhealthy relationships. This needed to occur before leaving detention and be reinforced on re-entry into the community.

It's not realistic at all. I go out and went straight to them [my friends]. They've been friends for quite a while, they're the ones you know, who you hang with, who stick with you, who help you out

Education

Prior to their incarceration, most young people had poor involvement in and bad experiences at school. Most of the young people had left school in their late primary years and had not achieved educationally for some years (see figure 1). As a result, many felt hesitant about engaging in education and had a lack of confidence in themselves and their capacity to achieve.

When I was growing up and shit, I wasn't going to school very much. I was just hanging out with bad kids, just hanging out and that. And I was getting into trouble and that. Like most kids who hang out with bad kids do

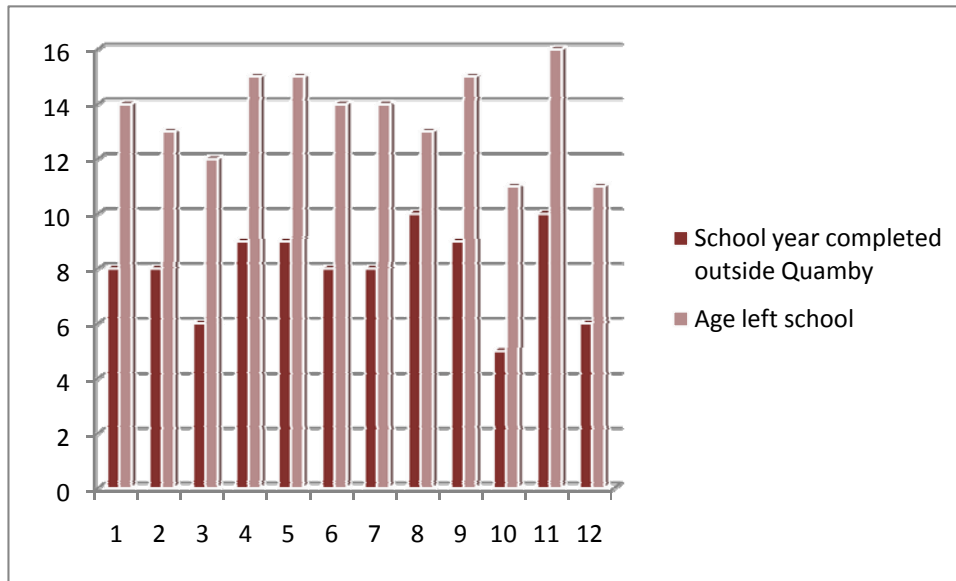


Figure 1: Engagement with school

In contrast to their early experiences, young people felt well supported and encouraged at the Hindmarsh Education Centre, Quamby's school program. Here they were able to reengage with education in a supportive environment which responded to their individual learning needs. Young people and their families were proud of their progress but were concerned that the assistance they received during periods of incarceration was not replicated on re-entry into the community.

In here it's good. I've almost finished my year 10. Most people are here are like me. They don't know much either. It's not that they don't know much, it's like educationally they don't. They're on the same education level as me. It's just a lot easier to put my hand up and go 'I don't know this' or just yell out 'can you help me'.

Instead, most young people reported great difficulty in re-entering the mainstream school system: often feeling monitored and judged by the school community; discouraged by administrative processes; and disengaged more generally. Most young people failed to transition successfully even though the Education Department has been progressing a number of transitional programs.

His support worker and I fought to get him into school – I introduced him to the principal and we went and had an interview and he was due to start at the beginning of the year. He knew some people and he said that he wanted to continue with his education unfortunately two weeks before he was due to start we got a letter to say his entrance to the school had been

refused and that they couldn't accept his enrolment...that set him back a lot to the extent he said 'stuff it, I won't go to school

Alcohol and other drugs

Alcohol and other drug (AOD) issues were of significant concern to 9 of the 11 young people in this study and influenced their pathway into crime and challenged their capacity to move out of it. Each of these young people had begun using heavily before they turned 14, with five of the young people beginning their use before they entered high school. This may have been because other family members used around them and because drug use was seen as a 'normal' activity.

I started with my Mum. That's just how it was in my family. We all did it

Young people talked about how their early drug use sat alongside a host of other risk-taking activities, and sometimes required them to participate in criminal activity to pay for their costly habits. Others reflected that while intoxicated they were more likely to participate in particular criminal behaviours (such as joyriding and assaults).

I've smoked marijuana since I was 9. It's just something that I do... I did have an ice problem before I came in[to Quamby]. Which was pretty bad... It made me wanna do things. I was so energetic. I didn't want to sit in one spot. And then when I come down off it I'd get angry and want more. That's why I went and the burglary that I did and why I'm back in here

Young people reported that they often 'used' to cope with a raft of personal and social challenges that they encountered. They said that their use was the most effective strategy in warding off depression and anxiety, in managing relationships, in dealing with uncomfortable situations or to deal with past difficulties. Until these underlying needs were identified and addressed, young people felt that dealing with AOD issues was going to be an ongoing difficulty.

It gets too hard so I started using em. It was only like 2 weeks ago that I started [after being out for 9 months]... It was everything, all too much. My Mum was here and she said she didn't want to have anything to do with me anymore... I just couldn't cope and I just had to [use]

Young people felt that the way they managed their alcohol and other drug use was one of the key determining factors in the success of their reintegration. Most young people found it difficult managing their use, particularly when their old friends and family were using heavily around them. They often felt that they could not talk to their families or youth justice workers about their use because they were worried about being breached for small misdemeanours or because they did not want to let people down. As such, many felt unable to get help when they needed it.

It would appear that more attention is required to identify and work with children who are exposed to alcohol and other drug use early in their lives and who begin using at an early age. Also, a greater understanding of the reasons why young people are using would be beneficial in being able to target responsive assistance as would family-focused support that helps young people manage their drug use when those around them are still engaging.

Age and development

A young person's age and developmental stage influences the likelihood of them engaging in criminal behaviour and the nature and extent of their involvement with the youth justice system. As such, there is a need to understand young people's developmental needs and to build these into the supports that are provided to them throughout their involvement in the system.

The way I see it for other people, how they're thinking is like, "I'm 14 so there's four years to go before I really get in trouble so I'll just do this"... and they come in here and it's nothing

The importance of recognising the additional needs of those young people who are not only transitioning from incarceration to the community but also from childhood to adulthood was also highlighted.

Young people's readiness and willingness to change

To make sustainable change in their lives, young people must feel ready and willing to modify their behaviours and to seek out new goals. Most of the young people in this study were determined to make these changes but reflected that this was as a result of a recent mindshift and one that they believed most young people (particularly those who were younger) had not yet made.

It's in the person, what they wanna do. If they don't wanna be in trouble they've gotta work at it.. There's nothing you can do, you can't make em, you cant make em 100% alright. There's gonna be people who'll help em but they've gotta wanna change, hey

Although they wanted for things to be different, young people often felt ill-equipped to make changes in their lives and had little confidence in themselves. They felt that the strategies that they had developed inside Quamby for managing relationships, for keeping optimistic and for responding to challenges were often Centre-specific and did not bode well in the risk-filled environment to which they were returning.

When I got out last time I said to myself "I'm never gonna come back here" but there's just heaps of little things you've got to look at. I reckon, just you've got to get it all 100 percent. You've got to have your work in place, stuff you're going to do when you get out. You've got to have that in place. You've got to have your family in place. Supports. You've got to have everything perfect for when you get out

Young people often took the view that they had to be 'perfect': that their abstinence from crime, drug-taking and other antisocial activity needed to be total and felt that they had totally failed if they made any mistakes whatsoever. In such cases, young people often reengaged in a raft of negative behaviours because they felt that they had already failed and that it wasn't worth them trying to resist because ultimately they were going to end up back in the system.

I just don't know anymore. I was all excited, thinking that things would be different this time that things would be all good, that things were planned. Maybe it was too much, that I got too worked up. But, you know, everything looked good.

Community preparedness

Young people believed that the communities to which they were returning were not willing to accept that they had changed or that they were committed to sustaining good life choices. In particular, young people felt as though police were constantly monitoring them and that they were being judged by old teachers, workers and services. They believed that when people around them were pessimistic that they found it difficult to remain hopeful and committed to progress but, conversely, that having people who believed in them and who affirmed their progress was incredibly liberating and encouraging.

They're on an authority trip, they'll never see you as different. As soon as I get out, if I'm walking down the street, they'll go "hey, there's [that young person]." Because everywhere I used to go they used to follow me – thinking I was going to rob people or stuff... Never giving me a chance, never thinking I've changed.

Giving young people and their communities opportunities to recognise their progress and their distance from crime appears to help sustain positive outcomes and to assist young people to remain focused on their goals. Young people also valued having people who believed in them, believing that this optimism was a powerful driver for them.

*having someone believe in you makes a huge difference. It's like you've gotta live up to their expectation cos you don't wanna let them down. But it's the opposite too, hey, like if they don't believe in you you're gonna f**k up to prove em right too*

Interdependence

Young people in this study often had limited support networks and operated in systems that did not foster stable and trusting relationships with adults (in either formal or informal ways). Many had been involved in the system for long periods of time and felt 'institutionalised', disconnected from their families and communities and unskilled socially.

I like it in here. It's like a second home. I can say that, that I've been institutionalised... When I'm on the outside I'd prefer to be back in here. It's not as stressful, it's more relaxed... Makes me feel bad, cos I know I shouldn't be this way, I shouldn't feel like this, that I'm more comfortable in here. I shouldn't be institutionalised, I shouldn't want to go back to lock up. I should be out on the outside living a good life. That's why I wanna leave town this time to see if that'll help, get me out of it. Change my thinking.

Transitioning from an environment where they had relatively few choices to make, consequences to face or challenges to negotiate to the community within which they felt solely responsible for their actions and decisions was often difficult for young people, particularly those without mentors or champions. Young people often felt alone and solely responsible for their transitions.

This flies in the face of good practice literature that promotes 'interdependence': young people feeling able to make change and to take charge of their futures when supported by

adults working alongside them, encouraging them and mentoring them through challenging situations and environments.

As such, the need for more opportunities for young people to develop these strong interdependent relationships was highlighted.

You lose everything inside. You get out and you don't know how to do shit anymore. And everyone expects you to do stuff for yourself and you're like really wanting to do it but sometimes you just don't know how. And it freaks you out and you start stressing and then you get all angry at yourself and then you cant do stuff even if you wanna. You kinda need someone just saying, 'yeah that's it', not doing it for you but like letting you know you're doing the right thing or going 'how about you try this' and helping you cos its completely different out, hey. Nothing like inside. And the longer you're in the harder it is

Rehabilitation

Old models of juvenile justice were underpinned by the view that young people needed to be held accountable and punished for their crimes. However, much of the research argues that justice systems, particularly those working with young offenders, must be reoriented towards rehabilitation and reintegration if positive outcomes are to be sustained.

In this study, young people did not believe that their incarceration had a rehabilitative function but that 'making good' was something that they had to do by themselves.

It's [rehabilitation] not very successful. Basically it's on you if you wanna change. Quamby doesn't help you... Quamby just a place to be put away. It's then on you to think about what you wanna do. Some people don't even think about it like that. They go in there and go 'rah rah rah' and then they go out and do the same thing and come back in. Always the same thing

They were sceptical of the system in rehabilitating young people because they and their peers had been in the system for so long and because they so often returned to crime; because they believed that most of the programming at Quamby focused on their time at the Centre rather than in preparing them for release; and because no changes were made to the communities to which they were returning. Instead, many young people recognised that they had become reliant on the system, had lost many living skills and often felt ill-equipped for dealing with the challenges confronting them outside.

Experiences of support

Most of the young people had significant and long-term involvement with different parts of the service system, with their connections to both statutory and non-statutory programs often reaching back to their early childhoods. However, their involvement was often limited and short-lived. Young people felt that this was because they did not believe that they had any problems, that they were not aware of what support was available or how to access it, and that they did not feel comfortable asking for help from people they did not know.

Although limited prior to periods of incarceration, young people had little if any contact with services with whom they were previously engaged while committed to the Centre. This was because services were often unaware of the young person's incarceration, because they did not have the capacity to provide ongoing outreach support or because they encountered administrative difficulties. Young people often took this non-involvement personally, believing that these services had given up on them.

They've pretty much finished. I'm still on their books but they don't do anything any more. Since I got in, they go 'who cares?'. Be nice for them to visit, but. Show they really cared

Young people were generally happy with the support that they were given during their time at Quamby, although they did believe that because of staffing difficulties they were often unable to access their case manager. They believed that supports generally focused on their time at Quamby rather than their transition and reintegration into the community. They generally believed that this was because their detention was about punishment and that if it encouraged their rehabilitation it was because the time out of the community gave them the opportunity to reflect and to make changes themselves.

When returning to the community, young people often found it difficult to find support even when this had been pre-organised. Young people reported that they were reluctant to engage with non-voluntary programs, did not feel comfortable connecting with services and workers they did not know or trust or to raise their issues with their community youth justice worker for fear of being breached. Young people also reported that because they had not made contact with available supports when life was good (and when they therefore did not need support) that they did not have the established linkages to draw upon when things worsened.

It's just, well I got out and everyone had stuff set up but no one's done nothing that they were supposed to. No one's helped me. It's too hard. So I've gone back on the drugs and shit. It's really hard because I really want to do well

It would appear that although some planning occurred prior to their release, most young people were 'lost in transition' because often no one was responsible for managing their case plan or ensuring that commitments were being fulfilled. Although community youth justice took charge of overseeing court-directed actions, they were often unable to take a broader view or respond to the significant challenges young people encountered. Poor communication across the service system, a high turnover in staff across programs and program guidelines which do not allow for continuity of care restrict integrated and seamless service provision to young people.

There's some people who are supposed to be helping me out but they're not here at the moment. [Do you know who they are?] No, I don't. I just know that they're supposed to be helping me. [Do you know what they're going to help you out with?] No... I just know that things were organised when I was in Quamby, but they're supposed to and [my community-based worker] was going to find out why they hadn't done anything. But I'm not too sure who they were or what they were supposed to do

Strategies that had been developed to help young people navigate the world outside of Quamby often did not take into account some of the underlying issues that led young people to criminal activity or the many risks that were present in their local environments (such as family drug and alcohol use, crime and conflict; the young person's own mental health issues and feelings of hopelessness). As such, many young people found them unhelpful.

The nature of support

One of the key emerging themes relates to the importance that young people place on positive relationships. It would appear that these formal and informal connections with adults and positive peers enable young people to grow and encourage them to make the changes that they want and need to make to desist from crime and become their 'hoped-for' selves. Young people in this study generally had limited connections outside of their families who, in a number of cases, were also not able to provide this ongoing, positive relationship.

Young people who had these connections (often with a worker at Quamby, with a sports coach or team member or a mentor) reported that they felt supported and encouraged and that they valued having someone to 'check in' on when they felt overwhelmed or tempted to reengage in old behaviours.

I think they're pretty important because if I didn't have them I would've, I don't reckon I'd be going as well as I am at the moment... I see them mostly once a week, twice a week. Whatever, whenever I need to talk to them. I talk to them on the phone every day. They help you. But they're there for you too. To talk to and that

Although they recognised their value, services across the system often did not allow for the development of these positive relationships because programs were either time or location specific (ie the case workers at Quamby only worked with them inside and the youth justice workers outside); because they were time limited (ie they were only available for short periods of time); because there was a constant turnover of staff; or because they felt that offering these relationships were unhelpful because they fostered dependence on the system. As such, young people were often passed from one service to another with little notice or planning; trusted relationships were severed; and young people were left feeling frustrated, let down and, in some cases, rejected. They reported that the more of these experiences that they had the less likely they were to attempt to forge new relationships in the future.

*If you've been f**d around, you're not gonna ask for help – from anyone. You give up. Think it's gonna happen again. "I'm gonna get let down". It's easier just not asking*

Young people wanted and needed workers and the system to be strengths-based: to see the positives in them and their progress; to link them with opportunities where they could achieve; to encourage them when times were difficult and to help them challenge their own pessimism and feelings of hopelessness during tough times.

I reckon it's good [to be hooked up with a worker]... You're not just coming out into the world with like nothing. Doing what you wanna do, what you need to do on your own. You've got someone there for you and like, who can tell you what you're doing is good or tell you what you're doing is bad

Young people also wanted assistance to be realistic and responsive to their needs: for workers to recognise that often their behaviours were a result of their circumstance or reflected their difficulties rather than their failures and that sometimes even small tasks were difficult to achieve. More time identifying these risks and challenges would help services provide more responsive and appropriate strategies.

Nah, you can't talk to them about the real stuff that's going on half the time cos you don't know what they're going to do with it [the information]. You know, you feel like you wanna tell them that you're using some drugs but wanna get off em and you need some help but you're kinda worried that if you do they'll breach you. So the one person who is there to support you, you can't tell em what's really going on. So that sux hey. And people think that cos you've got a YJ worker they're doing everything for you but half the time they don't really know whets going on. So you sort of can't win

Enabling young people to participate in decision-making and to have some ownership over their plans was seen as essential in not only empowering young people but also in encouraging their commitment to goals and actions. Encouraging and fostering natural supports, particularly friends and family, also appears to be imperative, so much so that services need to be reoriented to become more family focused and inclusive while assisting young people to forge positive relationships and informal support networks (such as sports teams, work groups and volunteer programs).

*You come out not knowing stuff no more. It'd be good to get help with that stuff, getting you ready. Helping you know things so you can make it. Cos you've missed out on so much and you know nothing. How to make friends, how to cope, how to get a job. All that stuff. Like I haven't even had a girlfriend and like I dunno know about that stuff. And I'm scared s**less about it and Quamby does jack all about that. If I was going to a normal school I'd learn about that stuff, sex, relationships but in here there's nothing. So yeah, it's big stuff but embarrassing stuff you're not gonna ask for*

These characteristics are not foreign to youth work practice but appear to be missing from many of the interactions that young people have with services across the government and non-government youth system. It would appear that programs need to get 'back to basics', to enable young people to develop trust and confidence in workers and to fully understand the nature and extent of supports available.

The principle of ‘mirroring’ services and approaches provided during periods of incarceration also appears to be essential in ensuring young people’s successful transitions: what is provided and how it is provided at the Centre needs to be replicated in the community so that progress can be sustained.

4. Key themes and issues

This project highlighted a number of key themes and issues. A broader discussion can be found in the larger report but, in summary:

Intervening earlier

Firstly, we would argue that most young people in this study may not have entered the system, or at least have been sustained for prolonged periods, if appropriate interventions had occurred for them earlier. We would argue that if the system had better identified the multitude of risks present in their environments and responded accordingly they too may have been diverted from the juvenile justice system and not have endured ongoing involvement unnecessarily. In particular, assertive support is required to: children who live in families affected by problematic alcohol or other drug use – particularly to intervene early so that these children do not form their own AOD issues; children who begin absconding from and leaving school at an early age; and families with children who have relatives engaged in criminal activity.

Rehabilitation and reintegration as the primary purpose of the system

For those who enter the system the primary goal should be on rehabilitation and the reintegration of young people into their communities. Punitive models of intervention have shown to be ineffective. They do not recognise or respond to the multitude of factors outside of the young person and their attitudes that also play a significant part in their behaviour. As such, all parts of the system (including, but not limited to services provided by Quamby and Community Youth Justice) must orient all assistance to meeting this goal: programs at Quamby must have a long term focus and be mirrored in the community so that effective reintegration can be achieved; the key challenges within young people’s families and environments that might limit the successfulness of reintegration must be explored and, when amenable to change, be addressed (through programs such as family group conferencing, mediation and skills development); when challenges are static,

concrete and realistic strategies and supports must be put in place to help young people manage these risks so that they become their hoped for selves and resist their feared selves.

To achieve this we would argue that a common, rigorous and broad assessment is required to understand fully young people's risks and protective factors and their support and responsivity needs. This assessment would recognise young people's developmental needs and help programs to tailor and target interventions to those most 'at risk'. It would also be used to identify the young person's strengths and the nature of any existing support networks that could be engaged to enhance formal service responses.

The need to holistically assess and young people's broad needs

To be able to achieve a positive rehabilitation and reintegration, the service system needs to understand and respond to the individual needs of young people within their family and community context early in their engagement. To target supports to those who most need them and to those most likely to sustain positive outcomes, the system must further understand young people's developmental needs, their presenting risks and protective factors, the available resources and opportunities and those influences that might limit the effectiveness of supports and strategies. This needs to be done holistically and be shared to minimise duplication. Where possible, strategies to identify young people who are at-risk of early criminality, drug using and involvement in other risk-taking behaviours need to be put into place so that they may be diverted from the juvenile justice system. Interventions need to take into consideration the challenges that young people face in desisting from crime, particularly when returning to risk-filled families and communities.

The need to develop and provide an integrated and seamless case plan that stretches across the service system and across their time both in detention and in the community

Most young people in this study had come into contact with both statutory and non-statutory systems for many years. Due to the nature of the current system and the makeup of services, most of the young people's involvement was short-lived and focused on a discrete aspect of their lives. Within the juvenile justice system, a lack of service coordination and minimal opportunities for joint planning and effective handover led to either service duplication or the development of contradictory or confusing case plans that

were often not implemented or monitored. The need for a single integrated and ongoing case plan was highlighted as was the need for a key worker who could oversee the provision of services and assist young people to connect with services when required.

Improved coordination

We would also argue that the suite of supports provided to young people must be well coordinated and managed. A single service must be identified and be given carriage for developing and overseeing a single case plan that follows the young person across their engagement in the justice system and beyond and across the broad array of programs that interact around them. This plan must focus on reintegration and identify a series of shared aims and goals that are achievable and measurable. All services must be held accountable for their responsibilities at regular case conferences. A key worker needs to be assigned to assist the young person directly (ideally the young person would choose this worker themselves) to talk through their concerns and ensure that the plan is meeting their needs. Families and / or other key natural and informal supporters need to be engaged in this process as equal partners in recognition of the important part that they can play in their child's life.

The need to provide services in a way that is accessible and responsive to young people individual needs

The current system appears to over-rely on young people seeking support during periods of difficulty and does not encourage or capitalise on families and friends as a potential resource throughout young people's involvement in the system. Young people in this study reported that they had little if any support from organisations because they did not know what types of services were available or how to access them; because they did not feel confident asking for help from people they did not know or trust; because they were reluctant to speak with statutory workers for fear of being breached; or because services were not available when they needed them. The need to enable young people to develop relationships with formal and informal supports prior to their release from detention was highlighted as was the need to engage families, peers and communities early in the life of service planning to maximise their involvement in, commitment to and ability to support young people's transitions and reintegration.

Responsive services

Programs working with young people must clearly articulate their goals, the nature of their roles and responsibilities, their capacity, their limitations and the ways that young people can access support. They must allow young people to build trusting and respectful relationships with workers, parents, other supportive adults and, where possible, positive peers which foster a sense of interdependence: young people must be encouraged to grow and take risks in the knowledge that they have a network of support that can assist them if required. Programs must build in opportunities for young people to achieve and constantly recognise their successes (no matter how small) in desisting in crime and achieving their goals. Services must enable a level of continuity care and predictability by minimising the number of workers involved in a young person's life and by building in effective handover processes to ensure that young people are able to build new relationships before they are reassigned. Services provided to young people during periods of incarceration must be mirrored in the community to ensure that outcomes are sustained.

Ultimately, as a system we must be hopeful both for the young people in our care but also in our capacity to help them make positive changes in their lives.