



Reaching Out Service: The Vulnerable Pathway

A 'Risk Support' and 'Getting Help' approach to support vulnerable children and young people

Samantha Ralph, Clinical Lead of the Vulnerable Pathway, shares how her work in the Reaching Out service at Mindworks Surrey, provides Risk Support and Help conceptualised by the THRIVE Framework for system change (Wolpert et al., 2019).

BACKGROUND ON THE VULNERABLE PATHWAY

The Vulnerable Pathway provides mental health and wellbeing support for the most vulnerable children and young people in the community. It has three streams:

- 'The Youth Offending Service' (YOS), was set up in September 2021 to meet the needs of children aged 10-18 referred from the YOS.
- 'The Vulnerable Youth', designed for children aged 16-25 who are out of education and employment.
- 'The Outreach Service' which covers youth who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. The service offers six to eight sessions, as well as signposting and advice, to help young people to access services, provide them with coping strategies and support them into education or employment.

TRAUMA INFORMED, INTERAGENCY MODEL OF THE VULNERABLE PATHWAY

Until recently, there has been limited mental health support for vulnerable young people on arrest, with little acknowledgement of what led them to commit a crime. The offending team supports police to understand how the young person's trauma, or mental health difficulties, may have led to certain choices.

The service sits within a Joint Decision-Making Panel (JDMP), consisting of a mental health team, YOS, police and social work. This partnership approach helps to ensure that young people are not criminalised unless a serious crime has been committed. We also provide support to the youth justice, diversion, and liaison service, by assessing historic and current risk and vulnerability for young people while they are in custody.

NEEDS LED SUPPORT FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE YOUTH OFFENDING SERVICE

Our young people present with significant risk, are often involved with gangs, vulnerable to being exploited and grooming, and may have additional needs. It can take months before a young person is ready to engage and there are no time limits to accessing our services, regardless of whether the YOS order finishes.

A lot of time is spent developing trust before introducing any therapeutic work. Young people are also offered mental and physical health assessments and speech and language assessments. They are asked for their views on their crime and given an opportunity to make amends to the victim with a letter or apology – restorative justice. By understanding what has led to the crime and including the voices of young people, we aim to recognise and meet their needs and preferences wherever they are currently at, in an environment that they feel comfortable in.

WORKING WITH NETWORKS AND THE WIDER SYSTEM

A lot of collaboration and communication takes place with the professionals involved with young people. For example, daily morning briefings are held with the multiagency YOS team to discuss anyone under the age of 18 who has been arrested. With the young person's consent, families are offered support to manage difficult behaviours and understand the challenges that the young person is facing.

Our support also stems into schools, by educating staff and other professions to consider the background and life experiences of young people in light of their crimes. We attend school meetings and observations,



gaining first-hand knowledge of what is happening in schools for the young person and share our suggestions and signpost schools to resources to help keep the young person in education.

For 'The Outreach Service' cohort, we provide up to eight sessions to focus on developing coping strategies to deal with the here and now and offer signposting to educational services, counselling or connecting young people with housing officers i.e. the Richmond Fellowship.

HELPING REDUCE STIGMA RELATED TO YOUNG OFFENDERS AND ANTISOCIAL BEHAVIOURS

Often young people who commit crimes can be perceived as risky and marginalised by services who do not want to work with them. Initially I was told the police would be reluctant to consider trauma or mental health when a crime has been committed. However, the police response has been extremely positive and we collaborated to provide a holistic view of these children, recognise their story and advocate for their needs. As a service, we try to diversify our approaches to meet the range of diverse young people accessing our service by building resilience and coping strategies in children and young people that otherwise may not choose to engage. In line with a Risk Support approach, children and young people can be met wherever they are at and supported to engage with a trusted person of their choice, whilst risk and accountability is shared across colleagues in the system who know the child or young person.

IMPACT OF THE SERVICE ON YOUNG PEOPLE

There have been major improvements and positive stories of young people moving away from gangs and making positive choices. We have developed a good record of desistance by intervening early, and following up to ensure that young people receive timely advice.

NEXT STEPS AND GOALS

Our hope is to provide inclusive and long-term support for young people. The youth offending cohort rarely access mental health support, many have a dual diagnosis of autism spectrum condition (ASC) or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), some require identification of needs, and others frequently miss school or do not attend psychiatry sessions. Recently, I collaborated with a colleague from Lewisham CAMHS to bypass a three-year waiting list and provide an ASD diagnosis for a 17 year old looked after child with challenging behaviours. We were able to provide a helpful service to the young person to explain his vulnerabilities and behaviour and ensure the support he needs to transition into adulthood.

Dedicated service for NEET YP

We are developing our 'Children Not in Education, Employment or Training' (NEET) pathway for young people that are out of education. Currently, around 50% of children in the vulnerable pathway are in the YOS. The other 50% have mental health needs, that keeps them out of education and excludes them from meeting 'criteria' for most services, meaning that they continue to get worse. As these young people are not in education and do not have an Education Health Care Plan (EHCP), our vision is for a dedicated person to conduct home visits, to develop a relationship with the young person and build their coping strategies to get them out of the house and eventually back into education or work.

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