



Interim Report: Evaluation of 'Keeping Families Together' with CashBack for Communities

October 2022

Dr Briege Nugent
briegenugentresearch@gmail.com

Contents

Executive Summary	i
1. Introduction and Overview	1
2. Key Findings from Young People and Families	4
3. Key Findings from Cyrenians and Secure Care Staff	12
4. Conclusion and Recommendations	15

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Cyrenians for commissioning this study and for all those who participated, particularly the families and young people, who approached this study with openness and hoped their input could and will lead to continued positive change.

**Evaluation of ‘Keeping Families Together’ with Cashback for Communities: Interim
Report Executive Summary
Dr Brieger Nugent
October 2022**

Introduction and Overview

This interim report of the ‘Keeping Families Together’ with Cashback for Communities is year two of a three-year evaluation. CashBack for Communities is a unique Scottish Government programme which uses the funds recovered from criminals under the Proceeds of Crime Act (POCA) in a positive way – to expand young people’s horizons and increase the opportunities they have to develop their interests and skills. Those who have been in the care system are vastly overrepresented in the criminal justice system. The focus of the project is to support young people who are in secure care to rebuild relationships with their families and return to the family home where possible. They do this through a number of different ways, namely carrying out Conflict Resolution Workshops, providing family mediation, advocacy, education around neurodiversity, one-to-one and practical support. The project was greatly affected by the pandemic in the first year as contact with the young people in residential care was not able to happen as envisaged.

This report presents findings of the work and outcomes achieved by Cyrenians using a multi-methods approach. The findings draw on repeated interviews with a mother, daughter and grandmother from two different families who have been supported by the service over the past year; a focus group session with young people who participated in a conflict resolution workshop; quantitative findings based on twelve young people who have been supported, focus group sessions with Cyrenians staff and interviews with staff from one secure unit. The main limitation is the lack of families who have engaged in the research process and there is a need for more families to participate in the next year, so that the depth of understanding about the process and impact can be understood.

Key Findings:

- The service has supported seven families through mediation and one to one support and over the past month more families have been referred. In addition, 19 young people have engaged in the Conflict Resolution Workshops. All of the young people and their families resided or continue to reside in the 20% most deprived areas in Scotland.
- The families interviewed said that Cyrenians was their main support and throughout the pandemic, the only ‘real’ support they had.
- The time taken to build trust and the extent of support required in helping young people transition out of the care system has had to be much more intense than what was previously expected. Staff also felt that when the young person was returning to the Lothians and where they are based is when the ‘best’ work was able to take place.
- The current referral route, which has been to reach families through the secure units has not provided the level of referrals that the organisation had hoped and planned for, and even despite the restrictions related to the pandemic easing.

Outcomes achieved

Cyrenians have achieved a very high standard of outcomes for the young people and their families being supported, specifically:

Outcome 1: Young people build their confidence and resilience, benefit from strengthened support networks and reduce risk-taking behaviour.

Young people and the families interviewed felt that their confidence had grown as a result of their engagement. All 12 young people self-reported that over the past year they have improved levels of self-confidence.

Outcome 2: Young people develop their physical and personal skills.

Through the Conflict Resolution Workshops young people report being more aware of how to react less and think more in situations and of having improved personal skills.

Outcome 3: Young people's health and well-being improves.

Young people said they felt calmer as a result of the workshops. All 12 participants have improved wellbeing scores self-reported over the past year using the SHANARRI indicators used by the service.

Outcome 4: Young people participate in activity which improves their learning, employability, and employment options (positive destinations).

Both young people felt that the workshops helped them to better understand how to deal with difficult situations. The service does not have any quantitative data yet on this outcome and it will be important to track this over the next year, collating data also around school attendance and progression into education.

Outcome 5: Young people contribute positively to their communities.

9 participants (75%) self-reported scores to the service show they felt their contribution, links with communities and social interactions are improving.

Outcome 6: Young people are diverted from criminal behaviour or involvement with the criminal justice system

No young person who has engaged with the project has had any further charges. 10 participants (83%) self-reported they felt less inclined to participate in anti-social and or criminal behaviour.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The learning at this stage is that this project is much needed and welcomed by families. This is a complex group to work with and to date the service are reporting positive outcomes. The main recommendations at this stage are that the project diversifies the referral routes to promote earlier engagement with social work services so that young people in or at the attention of the care system and their families are provided intervention sooner. It is also recommended that the service take account of the time needed to build trust and the extent of aftercare required, so that the numbers expected to be supported are realistic. Finally, the service would benefit from focusing support to those who are returning to the Lothians or developing a staff base in the West of Scotland.

1. Introduction and Overview

Cashback for Communities

CashBack for Communities is a unique Scottish Government programme which uses the funds recovered from criminals under the Proceeds of Crime Act (POCA) in a positive way – to expand young people’s horizons and increase the opportunities they have to develop their interests and skills. Phase 5 of CashBack of Communities runs from 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2023 and supports projects that provide a range of activities for young people between the ages of 10-24 which:

- Support people, families and communities most affected by crime
- Support those most at risk of being involved in antisocial behaviour, offending or reoffending into positive destinations
- Support young people most at risk of entering the justice system.

It also:

- Provides intergenerational support for parents, families and children impacted by Adverse Childhood Experiences.¹

The Care System and the Criminal Justice System

At 31 July 2020, there were 14,458 looked after children – an increase of 196 (1%) from 2019 (Scottish Government, 2021). Around 10% of young people in care are in residential accommodation and specifically 59 young people were in secure care (ibid). Placement in residential or secure care is often viewed as the ‘last resort’, it is stigmatising, there is a tension between care and control and it can be a criminalising environment (Day, 2021). Those who have been in the care system are vastly overrepresented in the criminal justice system, with a third of those under 21 in custody reporting having this background (Scottish Prison Service, 2016). *Who Cares Scotland* brings to light some of the reasons for this, with young people in care reporting feeling stigmatised by the Police, increased scrutiny in care placements and participation in difficult formal processes (Hanvidge and Hughes, 2018). They are described as facing ‘double jeopardy’, as by being placed in care they are often exposed to further risk factors that make them vulnerable to criminalisation (ibid). There is a dearth of research into what triggers, helps and hinders the process of desistance from offending by young people (Nugent and McNeill, 2017). What is even less understood is how to promote and support desistance among this population and the role of services within that.

In January 2022 the ‘Sentencing Young People Guideline’ came into effect after being approved by the High Court of Judiciary (Scottish Sentencing Council, 2022). This marks a change in practice as a result of this culmination of knowledge that young people are different to adults in terms of their development physically and psychologically, and should be treated differently in the system. Engagement for this population is especially challenging and has been shown to be down to dogged determination by workers, with building relationships taking significant time (Nugent, 2015). Young people have limited means to make their stake in society and crime offers a way of achieving social, economic, cultural or symbolic capital (Barry,

¹ To find out more information please go to: <https://cashbackforcommunities.org>

2018). For those in a gang or co-offending network, it can also be a way of achieving a sense of belonging when both school and 'home' have been sources of rejection (Weaver, 2015). The movement away from crime, then, can involve substantial loss, with 'knifing off' from peers leading to a painful, lonely existence (Nugent and Schinkel, 2017). Understanding how young people can be supported to desist from crime and how they are able to (re-)build a pro-social identity and access the kinds of resources and social opportunities that enable a meaningful life is imperative.

The Independent Care Review's (ICR) 'The Promise', published in February 2020, sets out an ambition for Scotland 'to be the best place in the world to grow up' so that children are 'loved, safe, and respected and realise their full potential' (2020: 4). Five foundations are set out to do this, namely:

- to include the 'voice' of young people in decision making, and for example to use data to do this.
- to support 'family' to stay together, with an emphasis on early intervention and prevention, drawing attention to the pervasive impact of poverty.
- 'care' so that where families are not able to stay together children are provided with loving stable, safe relationships.
- to recognise the 'people', the workforce and wider community that affect children's lives.
- to provide 'scaffolding', that is support for the workforce, to uphold children's rights as a matter of course, to create conditions for loving relationships.

'Keeping Families Together' with Cashback for Communities

The focus of the 'Keeping Families Together' with Cashback for Communities project is to support young people to rebuild relationships with their families and return to the family home where possible. They do this through a number of different ways, namely carrying out Conflict Resolution Workshops with young people in secure care, family mediation, one-to-one and practical support. The practical support has been wide ranging, from supporting families to get food parcels, electricity, sourcing toys at Christmas, weight blankets to help with anxiety and money for family days out. The service has also provided resources to family members supporting young people with neurodivergent conditions. Cyrenians have also played the role of advocate in some cases for parents, carers and the young people, to promote their rights and acting in a multi-agency way, arrive at solutions, sometimes creatively, that can help families and the young people get the help they need from the wider system.

It is notable that around half of young people (54%) leaving care return to their biological parents and around a half (43%) do not receive aftercare support (Scottish Government, 2021).² From the outset, Cyrenians planned to work closely with Secure Units in Scotland, to offer families their specific support, with the model to

² Scottish Government (2021) Children Social Work Statistics 2019-2020. Edinburgh: Scottish Government. Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/childrens-social-work-statistics-2019-20/documents/>

initially engage with individuals within the family, to understand their specific needs and be responsive to these, by for example linking them in with other services. The next step of the model is then to bring the family together, to have fun, through for example having days out, and to support them to understand each others needs as well as building on their strengths as a family. The organisation also planned to support the young people and their families as they transitioned out of the care system, providing more long-term aftercare, an area, as already highlighted, where more support has been identified as being needed. The service has set out to improve young peoples' confidence, physical and personal skills, health and well-being, promote positive destinations, contributions to the community and reduce risk taking and criminal behaviour.

This report presents findings, drawing on repeated interviews with a mother, daughter and grandmother from two different families who have been supported by the service over the past year; a focus group session with young people who participated in a conflict resolution workshop; focus group sessions with Cyrenians staff and interviews with staff from one secure unit. The main limitation of the research at this stage is the lack of engagement with families and secure care staff. All families Cyrenians have supported through this project were asked to take part, and an additional secure unit was approached, but did not agree to be interviewed.

This report is presented in three parts, firstly, the findings from young people and families including the outcomes achieved; secondly, findings from staff at Cyrenians and the Secure Centre, and in the third section, the conclusion and key recommendations.

1. Key Findings from Young People and Families

This section will present the key findings, firstly drawing on the observation and focus group with the young people who took part in the Conflict Resolution Workshop, before turning to the repeated interviews with a mother, daughter and grandmother from two different families, who have been supported by the service over the past year. The interviews initially took place at the end of 2021 and then again six months later. The section will also report on the summary of outcomes, drawing on the quantitative and qualitative data.

2.1 Key Findings from the Young People attending the Conflict Resolution Workshop

The Conflict Resolution Workshops are face to face with the young people and explore how young people respond to conflict, nurture their meaningful relationships and limit the impact of anger and aggression. These are an early intervention approach to reducing conflict at home, school and the wider community. The feedback from the service notes the positive impact made. One young person remarked “I really enjoyed it, it made a lot of sense and I am going to try to be less angry”. Another young person said “I thought this was going to be rubbish...but it’s actually minted!”.

At the time of writing 19 young people had attended the Conflict Resolution Workshops in Secure Care. Feedback from staff at two of the Secure Units reflected that they had never had the young people engage so well with an external facilitator. Through the trust established with the facilitator and the young people two referrals for mediation have been made, highlighting the value of these workshops, not only as a benefit in their own right, but to help young people recognise and ask for further support.

Two young people took part in the Conflict Resolution Workshop observed. The session focused on the different ways people can deal with challenging situations. The worker enthusiastically provided clarity on the differences between being assertive and being aggressive, discussed how people use power, as well as the different strengths and weaknesses of divergent approaches to problems. Both young people had already had a few sessions with the same worker and were very comfortable to speak openly about how they tended to react in situations and how they could deal with these ‘better’, taking what they had learned on board. The learning from the session were they following two key points, that the young people felt listened to, heard and was a chance to learn and have fun. They liked that the worker did not ‘dumb down’ the material, and they felt treated ‘like adults’, improving their confidence, helping them to feel calmer, understanding more about themselves and how others approached problems too. Both were being bullied and appreciated the space provided through the programme, where they felt safe and could be open about their feelings.

'When we come down here and we are doing things like this that we enjoy, it is like you can breathe.'

The workshops have been shown to contribute particularly to all of the outcomes as discussed in more detail below.

2.2 Key Findings from Family Members

The service has supported seven families and all were asked to take part in the research, but only two took up this offer. At the time of writing more referrals have been made and it will be really important to try to get as many engaging in the research process as possible. This section will present the key themes that emerged, focusing on the impact of the service, drawing from interviews with two women, a mother and grandmother who have been supported by the service for around a year.

Importance of direct consistent support to build trusting relationships

Both the mother and grandmother said that in the past the support offered has been for the children alone, and this was the first time they have been given support in their own right. Both women felt they could be open and honest with the worker in a way they had not in the past with other services, despite having lots of social work intervention in their lives. Cyrenians staff are frank and personable in a way that strikes a chord, and establish trust with women who report having struggled to do this with other workers before. Cyrenians build relationships by being consistent, responsive, going at the pace the individuals want, following through on what they said they were going to do, workers not being judgemental and both women felt it was important that engagement was their choice. In the second interview with Leanne, her grandchildren were back in care and she appreciated that the support had continued.

"It helps me to have someone to speak to and get advice. Even if I just text she gets back to me as soon as she can. I think that they are not social work and they are not family. She is brilliant, I am not just saying it... It is different, it is more flexible. I am not pressured into doing this. I am doing it of my own free will. I can always say I don't want to do it. I don't but I could. We have a wee cup of tea and blether. Social work often just work with the kids." (Leanne, first interview)

"I feel like I have known them all my life. I feel I can be me. I feel I can be totally honest... It is like a relationship I have never had before. It is really weird. I feel like I can be honest and they are not going to judge... Their approach is different. How they message you in WhatsApp. And when you are on the Zoom chats and you don't need to be professional...My social worker can be useless at times, you can be trying to get in touch with her for weeks and weeks and weeks. She should be at least messaging you back and saying what is happening. I think Cyrenians go above and beyond. They always get back to you." (Susan, first interview)

Learning to deal with and make sense of complex emotions and issues

Both family members shared that they had been abused when they were younger and through working with the service had come to learn about how this impacted on them. By the second interview Susan felt she wanted counselling to deal with past trauma and move on in her life. She felt the support given had made her feel safe to talk, not to keep things to herself as she has done all her life, and instead to confront how she was feeling. Both women said they had carried a lot of guilt about the children being in the care system and the service was helping them to let go of this and recognise they were asking for this help, for the better of the children and the family as a whole. Both women were providing support to children that have complex issues such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), autism, and Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) and the service was helping them to understand more and respond appropriately. Both women felt that the worker had helped them to deal with their anger. In the same way as the conflict resolution workshops, they taught them about not reacting but instead to think of 'better' ways to manage the situation. For example, to not shout at the children, and in meetings with social work, to not get angry but try instead to communicate calmly why they were frustrated.

*"I do deal with my granddaughter differently now, because of the diagnosis and I have taken on board that she doesn't like me shouting. I have had to change my ways."
(Leanne, first interview)*

"Just having her to talk to. She teaches me to think before I speak. There is a way of saying things. I am keeping my temper more... I am a tough cookie, she is able to calm me down and get me out of my stubbornness. I take on board what she says" (Leanne, second interview)

"Within myself I see a big change, just being able to talk, it has been half my problem. I wasn't allowed to talk as a child. Before, I would have kept things to myself and I used to worry about the kids being taken away. We weren't encouraged to talk when we were kids." (Susan, second interview)

Where relevant, the service have provided resources for family members about neurodiverse conditions so they can understand more and support the young people better. Feedback from parents and carers found that this had reduced conflict as there was a better understanding of a young person's capability to understand, process, complete tasks and abide by rules. This work therefore also supports the fulfilment of Outcome 3, which is to improve the young people's health and wellbeing.

Improved Mental and Physical Health

The service has supported both women to look after themselves more and to recognise their strengths, as well as understand what they could improve. Both women said the service 'being there' throughout the pandemic, with the worker going for walks, listening to them 'vent', had been invaluable, and it helped improve their mental and physical health.

“I would say my stress levels are halved, and I am not reacting how I would normally react. I don’t scream anymore... I am taking a wee bit of time for myself. So even if it is just taking the moment, that is my chill time.” (Leanne, second interview)

“Strengths – I am stronger than I had thought I was and I am not a bad mother. Those two things, they are the things I question myself.” (Susan, first interview)

By the second interview Susan was now working in a full-time role and felt that the support given to her by the workers to believe in herself had helped to make this possible.

Improved Relationships with the whole Family

Both women felt that by not reacting as they normally would, not shouting at the children, the family relationships had improved overall, and they had begun to regain authority as the main carer. Both women were clear that there was a lot more work to do to help them to come together as a family, and they appreciated that the support was not time limited. Susan reported that the family had not spent very much time together as a whole and the service was supporting the sister to regain trust for her brother.

“How I am thinking and feeling, these are the big changes. My daughter says she has seen the differences so that I am the mum now.” (Susan, first interview)

In the interview with the daughter Lauren, aged 11, she felt the family had become closer because of the support. She said:

“It has helped. I just feel there is someone there, and there are supporting the whole family, so my brother and me too.”

Practical Support

Both women appreciated the practical help given, for example, to discreetly and sensitively get Christmas present and food parcels.

“I was stressed about if there was enough presents at Christmas. She could see that in me. She said ‘You are a good mum’ – she told me that.” (Susan)

Suggestions for Improvement

The main suggestion for improvement was that all felt they would have benefitted from this support earlier. One family also said that they would like even more visits from the workers.

2.3 Summary of Outcomes Achieved

Cyrenians have achieved a very high standard of outcomes for the young people and their families being supported, specifically:

Outcome 1: Young people build their confidence and resilience, benefit from strengthened support networks and reduce risk-taking behaviour.

Young people and the families interviewed felt that their confidence had grown as a result of their engagement. All 12 young people self-reported that over the past year they have improved levels of self-confidence.

Outcome 2: Young people develop their physical and personal skills.

Through the Conflict Resolution Workshops young people report being more aware of how to react less and think more in situations and of having improved personal skills.

Outcome 3: Young people's health and well-being improves.

Young people said they felt calmer as a result of the workshops. All 12 participants have improved wellbeing scores self-reported over the past year using the SHANARRI indicators used by the service.

Outcome 4: Young people participate in activity which improves their learning, employability, and employment options (positive destinations).

Both young people felt that the workshops helped them to better understand how to deal with difficult situations. The service does not have any quantitative data yet on this outcome and it will be important to track this over the next year, collating data also around school attendance and progression into education.

Outcome 5: Young people contribute positively to their communities.

9 participants (75%) self-reported scores to the service show they felt their contribution, links with communities and social interactions are improving.

Outcome 6: Young people are diverted from criminal behaviour or involvement with the criminal justice system

10 participants (83%) self-reported they felt less inclined to participate in anti-social and or criminal behaviour.

Case Study of Supporting Dad

After successful workshops at Kibble a young person and their family requested mediation. Although the young person did not engage with Cyrenians the worker spent several weeks supporting the father. The work focused on ways to speak to his son and things to avoid saying or doing. The father was very receptive to the advice given and this has had a positive impact on the relationship. The son is now visiting his father at the weekends and this has been extended to three or four days instead of two on several occasions. It has been noted by staff and the father that the son's behaviour at home and in the unit has improved. As a result of the improvement in behaviour, the son has now moved from secure to residential care. The father was very grateful for the support.

Case Study of advocating for young person and developing multi-agency plans

Cyrenians attend support and review meetings to ensure adequate support is in place, working in a multi-agency way, contributing to care plans, to help those at risk of committing crime in the community. A Cyrenians mediator attended a 'back to school meetings' with Hailey, to support her integration to school and help her to voice coping strategies for when arguments arise. It was agreed that Cyrenians would have an hour of young person's timetable to do one-to-one sessions on anger management and emotional regulation.

Case Study of supporting mother and daughter, preparing for return to home

Sophie was referred by the Secure Unit. She has a history of suicidal ideation, absconding and sexual abuse towards her from family members. Her relationship with her mother, who was a positive figure in her life had deteriorated, and this was of significant importance due to her imminent return to the family home.

Both Sophie and her mother engaged in mediation, focusing on open and honest communication, their desire to strengthen their relationship, to keep Sophie safe when she is at home, including boundaries set clearly for other family members. The mother was concerned Sophie was not revealing her true feelings. In mediation Sophie was quiet but able to communicate effectively when she had a clear boundary that she felt had been violated. Through mediation they established that Sophie did not want to have contact with a specific family member, and that to prepare for going home she wanted to be placed in residential care first, which is what then happened. Through this process the mother became more confident about communicating with Sophie and apologised for things said in the past. She said she felt more comfortable, less stressed and was enjoying their time together. They are now receiving one-to-one support from Cyrenians, something they initially did not think was possible. Sophie feels safe now to return home.

Case Study highlighting the value of a whole family approach

An initial referral was made by the secure care centre as Sean was moving to an open unit near family and staff felt some mediation between them would be helpful. Sean's autism made understanding Cyrenians work a challenge, and Cyrenians focused on supporting Sean's aunt and younger brother Steven who was getting involved in anti-social behaviour. The Mediator and Family Outreach Worker have supported Steven to regulate his emotions and how to have conversations with family members. Steven is currently in a residential unit due to a breakdown

in relationships at home a few months ago. The mediator has built up a trusting relationship with the aunt and they have spent time discussing the relationship she has with both nephews. She has opened up about past trauma and Cyrenians are teaching her about regulation and dysregulation of emotions, autism, the teenage brain, the central nervous system and how it operates and affects behaviour. The service is also teaching her communication strategies, such as the importance of non-verbal communication; responding rather than reacting to young people; enabling young people to find their own voice; giving praise and positive regard without caveats. Cyrenians have liaised with social workers, care unit staff, school staff and community police who are all in touch with the family. Cyrenians have linked Sean in with a specialist in autism and other neuro-diverse conditions to help improve his and the family's understanding of and ability to manage the challenges related to autism. Cyrenians have supported the family to have days out such as going to the zoo and football matches, to build their relationships and create memories. Cyrenians provided the Aunt with a tablet through Connecting Scotland so she could attend school and unit meetings when they were online. They have also sourced Sean a weighted blanket to help with his anxiety. Social work has praised Cyrenians for the support they have given the family and for the observed shift in family dynamics.

Case Study of young person and family supported in and out of care

Daniel was referred to Cyrenians as part of their wider support plan to return to the community after being in several different secure unit placements. Daniel had been suffering with low mood and used illegal substances to make himself feel better. He was put in secure care to keep himself safe. The referral to the Cyrenians was for Daniel and his mother to focus on working on their relationship and to reconnect with his brother and sister. Although he wouldn't be returning to the family home it was felt that family would be an important part of his support network and that Cyrenians would focus on re-establishing and strengthening their connections.

At first, the mother said she wanted "nothing to do with her son" if he continued with substance misuse as her focus was on protecting her two younger children. However, through pre-mediation and support meetings Cyrenians helped the family explore what they might do or say differently to have a conversation about these concerns in a calm way, and provided one-to-one support also to the brother and sister.

At one mediation meeting with Daniel the Mum reflected that she seemed increasingly able to support her son while regulating her own emotions and anxieties about some of his behaviours and choices. Mum said, "I want you to know I'm trying hard not to judge but to be supportive and be there for you whatever you decide." Cyrenians worked with Daniel to help him know he could reach out to his family to spend time with them, to ask for support, or simply to let them know he's

'doing okay'. The family are now in touch more regularly and they family have helped Daniel out with shopping and cleaning his own flat.

Cyrenians provided a 'self-care and wellbeing pack' which included a weighted blanket and self-help guides on emotional regulation and cognitive behavioural techniques to Daniel. They linked the mother in with another organisation to provide gifts at Christmas as she was struggling financially.

The family spoke about wanting to spend quality time together but not being able to afford it, so Cyrenians provided the family with tickets for a day out where they went to the zoo and had lunch together. They sent a card to say "Thank you so much – we really appreciate all the help and support for our family. We loved every minute of it."

Cyrenians supported Daniel who struggled to live independently, to have food parcels delivered from the FareShare depot and to build up independent travel skills for college. For his birthday Cyrenians sourced a personalised birthday cake from Free Cakes for Kids and put together a gift package with materials for college and other items relating to his interests. They also attended review meetings to ensuring (with Daniel's permission) that the young person's views on how things are progressing were shared. Cyrenians continue to support the whole family.

2. Key Findings from Staff at Cyrenians and a Secure Centre

This section reports on what has been working well and the challenges encountered by staff working in this project.

3.1 What is working well

The model of support to build trust and connections with families: Staff have worked well with a small number of families (7). The model, which is to meet with individuals within the family first, working with them one on one, before bringing them together to work as a family has worked very well. The time taken to build trust has been longer than anticipated and for future learning this needs to be factored in. At least two families have been supported to have a family day out, something they had not done in years or not at all, and another family were being helped to plan a holiday together.

Follow on Support and Linking Families locally: All staff felt that the service has been shown to be really needed by young people and their families when they transition out of care and into the community, whereby those connected have been supported for over a year. One of the secure centres reported that they currently offer 12 weeks of support to young people and their families when they leave care, and one of the key learning points for them has been how in reality the time needed is much more, and has been a key benefit of this project and working in partnership.

All noted that the 'best cases' they have had were two young people who had returned to the Lothians, and because of the close proximity to the team, they were able to provide more intensive support. For example, during the pandemic they delivered food parcels and met with the young person often, building good relationships, that would have been more challenging if they did not live as close. Staff at the secure unit also felt that it would be good to have a worker based in the West of Scotland, as they recognised that logistically it is easier to provide support when the distances are not as great.

Partnership working with Secure Unit Staff: Staff from both Cyrenians and those interviewed from one secure unit felt they had strengthened their partnership. Staff at Cyrenians were also able to help identify problems and to feed back to staff within the Unit, so for example, in one case they reported the young person was being bullied and secure unit staff had not been aware. Cyrenians staff have also engaged with Secure Centres with 'fresh eyes' and questioned some of the practices. For example, in one secure centre the young people were strip searched when they returned from a home leave and one young person said that this was a reason why they did not go home. Cyrenians management were challenging this 'norm' to ensure young peoples' best interests remain at the core and risk management is proportionate.

Building Connections with Social Work Services and Providing Early Intervention: In one case, in response to a social worker referral, the service have been successfully

supporting a young person and their family to plan a family holiday. The young person is currently in residential care and this work to date is helping to prevent them from going into secure care. Workers reflected that the sooner they can engage with families in the process, the better it is for all.

Staff Expertise and Resources: The team have recognised the positive impact of the arts on the young people being supported and in response now have an arts therapist employed. The team have also developed a partnership with Edinburgh University, with students in counselling, so they can provide families with free counselling. Essentially, the team are now in a better position than when they began, with the skills and connections to support people better.

Staff Reflexivity and ongoing Training and Development: The team were unable to get access within the secure units during the pandemic, and used this time to complete training in working with young people with sexually harmful behaviours and issues with neurodiversity. Staff from the secure units were also invited to take part in this.

3.2 Challenges

The Pandemic: The project has been greatly hampered by the pandemic. In the initial stages meeting young people using digital platforms presented challenges, with many not wanting to be on camera, and not being able to have face to face contact made building rapport difficult.

Time taken for staff across all secure units to understand the 'offer' made by the project: Where Cyrenians have had connections with a secure unit already, staff there were much quicker to understand the benefits of them being involved and how this supports families to maintain or strengthen their connections. However, this has not been the case across all of the secure units approached, and the time taken for staff to understand and have 'buy in' has been much longer than anticipated. It was suggested by Cyrenians staff that people have struggled to understand the meaning of 'mediation', or had reservations, and that had not seen that this is appropriate to all families where the young person has been in care. It was recognised that the pressures staff have faced has been a barrier to engagement.

Lack of Referrals: Staff were frustrated about the lack of referrals and understood the challenges staff have faced in the secure centres, particularly with inspections, staff changes and the time taken to build trust with young people and their families. Staff at the secure unit also reflected that they had not expected getting referrals to be so challenging, but they also noted the difficult and complex relationships, with many young people not willing to engage in this process with their families. They felt that the learning taken forward for the project is to be realistic about the numbers of people who can be effectively supported, considering the length of time to build trust and the extent of support needed after young people have left care. Workers at

Cyrenians had originally envisaged that they would be meeting families, alongside the Secure Centre Staff, and in doing so making a direct offer to them about how they could help families. Up until now, Cyrenians have had to rely on the secure centre staff to explain the service to families and act as gatekeepers for the referrals, and all felt that because they therefore are not personally known to families, hampering engagement. One of the ways they wanted to increase referrals was through direct engagement with the young people, through for example, the Conflict Resolution Workshops. Cyrenians felt that the ideal system would be what had been originally envisaged, but again also understood the pressures Secure Centre Staff face.

Information Sharing: Staff reported that information within the Secure Centre was not always shared so that sessions planned had not gone ahead as planned, for example, because it clashed with education classes, and so there was no one who attended on the day.

3. Conclusion and Recommendations

The service has supported seven families and 19 young people have engaged in the Conflict Resolution Workshops. This research reports on interviews with two young people, two families, Staff at Cyrenians and one Secure Centre. Based on the testimonies of those supported in the centres and in the community, this is a much-needed service. The model, which is about providing individuals with support in their own right as well as bringing families together 'works', because it takes account of the often complex and difficult backgrounds this target group have experienced. Some of the key learning at this stage is that building trust has taken even more time than had been originally anticipated. Moreover, the extent of support has been much greater than had been envisaged, with families still feeling that they want and need support a year on from their initial contact. It was also observed that where young people are returning to the Lothians and where Cyrenians staff are based, this is where the strongest connections have been established. This research spotlights the challenges the service has had to deal with because of the pandemic and also the main frustration, which has been the lack of referrals. Despite the challenges, the service has had a positive impact on families and have achieved outcomes, improving young people's self-confidence, personal skills, health and well-being, learning, diverting them away from anti-social behaviour and to contribute to their local communities.

In light of the findings, the main recommendation at this stage is to diversify the referral routes, building more connections with social work services who are supporting families at risk of the young person being taken into care. The extent of the intensity of support highlights the value of staff being based also in the localities the young people are returning to, and strengthens the case for a particular focus to be on young people to be in the Lothians or the staff base to be developed in the West of Scotland. It is also important, taking account of the time involved, that the service is realistic about the number of families that can be supported. Finally, there was some discussion with staff about how describing the service as being about 'mediation' has led to confusion about what the service offers, so it is suggested instead that this is reframed as 'family support', which also is a much more accurate description, considering the breadth of help being given.

The next steps for the research will be to hear from more young people and families, to chart their journeys and measure outcomes, and to understand how the project and partnerships develop over this next stage.

References

Barry, M. (2018) *Youth offending and youth transitions: The influence of capital on desistance from crime*. Colchester, Essex: Economic and Social Research Council. [10.5255/UKDA-SN-850680](https://doi.org/10.5255/UKDA-SN-850680)

Day, AM (2021) *Experiences and pathways of children in care in the youth justice system*. HM Inspectorate of Probation. Available at: <https://www.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/hmiprobation/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2021/09/LL-Academic-Insights-v1.0-Day.pdf>

Hanvidge, L. and Hughes, L. (2018) *Who Cares? Scotland's Report on the Criminalisation of Care Experienced People*. Glasgow: Who Cares Scotland.

Independent Care Review (2020) *The Promise*. Available at: <https://www.carereview.scot/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/The-Promise.pdf>

Nugent B (2015) Reaching the 'hardest to reach.' *Youth Justice*, 15(3): 271 - 285.

Nugent, B. and McNeill, F. (2017) Young people and desistance. In Furlong, A. (Ed.) *Routledge Handbook of Youth and Young Adulthood*. London: Routledge pp. 411 - 420.

Nugent, B. and Schinkel, M. (2016) Pains of Desistance. *Criminology and Criminal Justice*, 16(5): 568 - 584.

Scottish Government (2021) *Children's social work statistics: 2019 to 2020*. Edinburgh: Scottish Government.

Scottish Sentencing Council (2022) *Young People Sentencing Guideline*. Edinburgh: Scottish Sentencing Council. Available at: <https://www.scottishsentencingcouncil.org.uk/media/2171/sentencing-young-people-guideline-for-publication.pdf>

Scottish Prison Service (2016), *Prisoner's Survey 2015 – Young People in Custody*. Edinburgh: Scottish Prison Service.

Weaver, B. (2015) *Offending and Desistance: The importance of social relations*. London: Routledge.