



Evaluation of the Youth Justice Liaison and Diversion (YJLD) Pilot Scheme

Executive Summary to the Final Report

1. Introduction

The Youth Justice Liaison and Diversion (YJLD) pilot scheme was developed in 2008 to enhance health provision within the youth justice system and facilitate help for children and young people with mental health and developmental problems, speech and communication difficulties, learning disabilities and other similar vulnerabilities at the earliest opportunity after they enter the youth justice system.

This is the executive summary to the final evaluation report for the six YJLD pilot schemes funded by the Department of Health and evaluated by the University of Liverpool. The report is in line with the reporting requirements of the Department of Health and has received approval for the procedures and methodology of the study from all relevant ethics committees and organisations. The report was reviewed by five independent peers and representatives from five government departments (including the Department of Health) and the Centre for Mental Health. The final version of the report was delivered to the Department of Health in January 2012.

Results presented here refer to the period from the date of first referral to any of the YJLD schemes (January 2009) to September 2011. A literature review and a detailed explanation of methods and procedures used in the evaluation are presented in the full report.

2. The objectives of the YJLD scheme

Based on the existing evidence (reviewed in the full report), the Department of Health committed to testing out a model to bridge the existing gaps in both provision and research in this area. Six pilot sites were selected to develop a YJLD scheme to enhance health provision in their Youth Offending Services (YOS), starting with Lewisham in December 2008 and the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, Peterborough, Wolverhampton, Halton and Warrington and South Tees during 2009. The pilots were initially funded until March 2012.

The YJLD scheme was developed in order to facilitate help for children and young people with mental health and developmental problems, speech and communication difficulties, learning disabilities and other similar vulnerabilities as soon as they enter the youth justice system. The pilots were set up at a time when there was little or no systematic diversionary activity to identify these particular needs amongst young people at point of arrest, where there was previously no input. This has meant that early identification and support has not been possible for young people. Thus the YJLD scheme had a specific focus on the early stages of the youth justice system, with the aim to avoid duplication with other health resources within the YOTs (which tend to be focused on young people who were given a statutory order).

The specific objectives of the YJLD pilot scheme are:

- To **improve early identification** at the point of entry into the youth justice system (YJS) (usually the police custody suite) of under 18 year olds with mental health, learning, communication difficulties or other vulnerabilities affecting their well being;
- To **enhance access** for these groups of vulnerable young people in the YJS to multi agency support equipped to meet their needs;
- As appropriate, **to divert** young people either **from the YJS** towards personalised packages of health and social care or, **within the YJS**, to services better equipped to meet their health, emotional well being and welfare needs;
- To **promote more timely and cost effective disposal** of cases within the court system and quicker and earlier linkage to appropriate services;
- To **reduce longer term offending**;
- To **reduce health inequalities** and
- To **support joined-up working** between the YOS, the police, the local authority, the CPS, magistrates, the PCT, CAMHS, and the voluntary sector.

3. The objectives of the research evaluation

The evaluation sought to explore the effectiveness of the scheme as the primary objective and providing descriptive accounts of processes making up the YJLD scheme as secondary. Specific objectives of the evaluation were to:

- Create a profile of the sites where the YJLD scheme was implemented;
- Create a profile of the young people who are being screened, assessed and/or engaging through the six YJLD pilot schemes;
- Assess whether the young people who have had access to the pilot schemes re-offend at a lower rate (including frequency and severity of proven reoffending) than a comparable group of young people who have no such access;
- Assess whether the young people who have had access to the pilot schemes desist from offending for longer than a comparable group of young people who have no such access;
- Measure changes in YJLD candidates' identified mental health needs and other vulnerabilities (over a three month contact period);
- Identify the factors that are associated with any effect and the way in which these associations vary in different subgroups;
- Measure overall reoffending, first time entrant, custody and ETE rates before and after implementation of the YJLD scheme in YJLD YOT areas compared to non-YJLD YOT areas;
- Assess the value for money that the scheme represents and any emerging economic implications;
- Explore perceptions and experiences of the scheme amongst young people and their families;
- Explore staff and other key stakeholders' views on early intervention, decision making processes, partnership working practices and the impact of the YJLD scheme, including barriers and enablers to establishing YJLD schemes;
- Identify implications of the findings for future policy and practice and provide recommendations regarding diversion and liaison schemes for young people and how they can be designed more effectively.

4. Methodology

To address these objectives, the evaluation included two distinctive but interdependent strands of work: quantitative and qualitative. The quantitative studies sought to analyse changes in a range of measurable outcomes, while the qualitative element aimed to provide an in-depth and richer insight into relevant processes and enable, where possible, a better understanding of the quantitative findings. Five distinctive but interrelated studies were conducted for the purpose of this evaluation: (1) Reconviction study; (2) Mental health outcomes measures study; (3) YOT level study; (4) Qualitative study and (5) Economic study. Additionally, data available on the project’s information system, the Webshare was analysed to create a profile of the young people who were referred to the YJLD pilot schemes during the period under investigation (January 2009 – August 2011).

The procedures and methods used to conduct the research were approved by an NHS Research Ethics Committee (REC) and the Ministry of Justice Research Quality Assurance (RQA) system. An application for the Justice Statistics Analytical Services Unit (JSAS) of the Ministry of Justice to provide access to data derived from the Police National Computer (PNC) was also approved. While a detailed account of the procedures is presented in these forms, additional details of the methods used are provided in the full report.

The results presented in the YJLD final report and summarised here emerge from both quantitative and qualitative analyses of data. These are summarised in *Table 1* below:

Table 1 Summary of methods

	Data	Cases (n)	Timeframe (data)	Timeframe (data collection)	Procedures
Quantitative	Webshare	1027	Jan09-Aug11 32 months	Aug11	Data inputted by YJLD staff on electronic system and extracted by research team
	PNC	435	Jan09-Mar10 Follow up: Jan09-Jun11 (15-30 months)	Jul11	Data provided by MoJ. Reoffending data - sanctioned offences (pre-court and court) for cohort in 4 intervention sites (with YJLD) and 3 control sites (without YJLD). Intervention and control groups matched prospectively and retrospectively
	HoNOSCA & SQifA	37	Sept10-Jul11		Assessments undertaken by YJLD practitioners at entry point (T1) and at exit point (T2) (approximately 3 months after the sign up) to measure change.
	CA-SUS	20	Nov10-Jan11	Jun-Jul11	A small intervention (YJLD) group (11) compared with a matched small control group (YOT based). Face to face/telephone interviews with YJLD/YOT worker

	Case studies	2	Unknown	Sept11	Collated by YJLD workers
	YJMIS statistics (aggregate)	n/a	Mar05-Jan11	Jun11	Aggregate data on FTE, ETE, Reoffending in 4 YOTs (with YJLD) and 3 YOTs (without YJLD).
	MoJ statistics (aggregate)	n/a	Jan07-Mar07 Jan08-Mar08	Nov11	Reoffending rates for reprimands and final warnings.
Qualitative	Face to face interviews with service users	24	Estimated Jul10-Jul11	Feb-Sept11	Service users recruited by YJLD practitioners. Informed written consent given prior to all interviews.
	Face to face interviews with staff/stakeholders	26	n/a	Mar-Jul11	Informed written consent given prior to all interviews
	Focus groups (stakeholders)	2	n/a	Sept11	Group sessions with staff and key stakeholders. Informed written consent given.
Other	Secondary (documents & participant observation)	n/a	n/a	Jan10-Sept11	Protocols and pathways provided by YJLD practitioners. Visits, meetings and attendance to forums.
Triangulation	All above	n/a	Jan09-Nov11	Nov-Dec11	Drawing common themes, cross-referencing, recommendations

5. Main caveats of data and methods

It is important to ensure that the conclusions of this evaluation are stated with the appropriate degree of confidence, given the multiple challenges in both establishing and evaluating the scheme. The findings throughout the evaluation are best described as tentative and indicative of potential future developments in both the scheme and any further evaluation. Even where statistically significant differences or associations are noted from the quantitative analysis, these do not indicate a simple causal relationship between exposure to the scheme and changes in outcomes. Therefore it is worth summarising here the main caveats of the evaluation model, as they determine the reliability and robustness of the data presented in this report and give an insight into how the findings should be interpreted.

It should also be noted that this is an evaluation of a pilot scheme in its early stages, a scheme constantly evolving as it faces and solves barriers along the way. The YJLD scheme was only implemented in late 2008 (in some sites late 2009) and many of the scheme's processes were under development or changing at the time of the evaluation. This had an impact on the quality of the information inputted on the project's information system, the Webshare, sample sizes, access to respondents and, more importantly, practitioners' availability and commitment to the research element of the evaluation – as they were key in collecting the data or facilitating the research team in doing so.

5.1. The reconviction study

The reconviction study used a quasi-experiment comparing reoffending rates between concurrent intervention and control groups. A variety of techniques was used in order to provide a close match, including prospective matching the intervention and control groups at geographical (YOT area) and individual level, as well as retrospective matching to account for any differences between the two groups. Unfortunately the matching strategy, the statistical analysis and emerging results were limited by a myriad of factors, e.g:

- Firstly, only 4 out of the 6 intervention sites were included in the analysis, as all attempts to secure an appropriate comparator for the other two have failed. Three control sites were used for these intervention sites.
- Given the differences between teams in terms of how the scheme was implemented ‘on the ground’; it was not meaningful to aggregate data across sites in the two groups. Therefore analyses are conducted between individual pairs of teams so that, while the overall sample size was large for this type of evaluation (<400 participants), sample sizes in the individual comparisons is relatively low.
- Secondly, the quality of the information provided by the YJLD/intervention sites regarding the young people who were referred to the pilot scheme was limited. For example some pilot sites were unable to provide the research team with basic information regarding young people’s demographics (e.g. age, ethnicity), while the majority struggled to provide information on type of index offence, date of arrest, date of caution or offender’s circumstances, including risk factors. This is not due to their unwillingness to provide these data, but to the nature of the scheme, intervening with young people at a very early stage within the youth justice system and when such information is not typically collected. As a result, the research team were unable to create an accurate profile of the young people with access to the scheme. However, it should be noted that the results presented here have taken into account and adjusted for any identified significant differences between the two groups (through statistical control), e.g. age and offending history.
- Thirdly, the reconviction study included young people referred to the YJLD scheme at the pilot sites in the very first year of its implementation, which means that some sites had very limited numbers of young people included in the study and, more importantly, a small proportion of these young people would have engaged with or received support from the YJLD team.

More information about limitations, the matching process and sampling could be found in the full report and appendices.

5.2. The mental health outcome measures study

Similarly, the mental health outcomes study was hampered by lower than expected sample sizes. It was initially planned to have 25 completed questionnaires at both points in time for each site (which would have yielded a total sample size of 150). Both the confidence with which trends can be detected and general conclusions drawn, and the capacity to undertake meaningful sub-group analyses (e.g. by study site) are considerably impeded by the low overall numbers. Secondly, as with the reconviction study, it is difficult to draw causal inferences from any observed changes in scores. There is no ‘untreated’ comparison sample here and there would have been no possibility of allocating young people thought to have problems to diversion services on a random basis.

5.3.The economic study

Although the evaluation was able to establish that the YJLD project interacted with other services (designed to prevent offending behaviour and support young people with mental health and developmental issues, learning disabilities and other vulnerabilities), it was impossible to measure and attribute costs linked to the input of each agency, project or staff (other than YJLD) that were involved in the care pathway of these young people. Similarly, with the aim of comparing the costs of the re-offences committed by the YJLD and matching cohort an analysis of the number and types of offences was conducted. This is limited for a number of reasons: (1) the economic analysis was based on the reoffending results which were based on non-statistical significant differences in effect size between the intervention and control groups, small samples and limited matching between the groups; (2) the methodology used to classify offences as occurring prior to their involvement with the YJLD or YOT as part of this study was imperfect due to complexities in the data; (3) the costs allocated were court costs alone and (4) the dynamic nature of the YJLD scheme prevented a pure like for like comparison.

5.4.The qualitative study

The qualitative analysis provides rich and in depth information about how the pilot schemes operate and about the type of young people with access to the scheme. However, this element of the evaluation was limited to a certain extent by a lower than expected number of interviews with young people and carers (for example 24 interviews were conducted in total), whilst the aim had been to conduct a total of 36 (with 6 per site). However, no interviews were undertaken at one YJLD pilot site and only 2 at another. Although the research team sought to improve the response rate by offering incentives and follow up 'opt in' letters, these methods were unsuccessful in these two sites. This reflects the difficulties of engaging the young people both with the scheme and its research component. YJLD staff highlight the limitations involved when working with this group of young people and the low level of engagement. In light of this, one should be cautious about the extent to which the results from interviews reflect the experience and views of the all young people across all sites.

5.5.Triangulation

Seeking to identify which elements of the YJLD scheme might contribute or are associated to positive outcomes (e.g. non reoffending, improved mental health and wellbeing), the evaluation team tried to use statistical modelling combining outcomes and the information captured by YJLD practitioners through the Webshare, the scheme's own management information system (e.g. actions taken by YJLD teams, type and length of intervention etc). Whilst some tentative evidence of relationships between YJLD activities and outcomes is examined, unfortunately the Webshare data was limited which had an impact on the robustness of these emerging results.

6. Summary of findings

6.1. Profile of YJLD activity

Just over a thousand young people (n=1027) were referred to and offered access to the scheme in the six pilot sites (December 2008 to August 2011). The young people are predominantly males (71%) and White British/N European (67%). Their average age is 14.7 (sd. 1.7; 10, 17). When compared with national statistics (for 10-17 years old proven offending population in 2009/10) (Ministry of Justice, 2011), there is an indication that the YJLD population comprises a slightly higher proportion of children and young people from BME backgrounds (10% compared with the national 6%), which mirrors one of the priorities of the scheme in working with young people from a BME background. Additionally, the reoffending study has also highlighted that young people with access to the YJLD scheme tend to be younger and more likely to have a history of offending (in some sites) than those being referred to the YOTs, indicating that the scheme has been successful in picking up those with a higher risk of poor outcomes.

Out of the 1027 young people who were offered access to the scheme, about a third directly engaged with the YJLD teams (30%), while in 27% of cases, the YJLD workers have liaised with professionals on behalf of these young people or undertaken screening without identifying any vulnerabilities (4%). About a quarter of young people referred to YJLD did not engage with the teams (26%), which reflects the difficulties the YJLD teams have encountered in accessing young people, as referrals did not always come through swiftly and young people had to be accessed through 'cold' letters or telephone calls. Relatively low levels of engagement could also be down to the voluntary nature of the scheme and/or the difficulty in engaging and working with 'hard to reach' young people.

Results indicate that over 3100 'YJLD actions' were undertaken on behalf of or while working with the young people referred to the scheme. These actions reflect that the YJLD teams have been particularly successful in developing and/or consolidating links with the agencies involved with the young people, especially CAMHS, the family, the YOT, the police, as well as other key stakeholders such as psychiatrists, schools and social services.

In line with the YJLD model, the sites have been successful in screening for a wide range of needs and to undertake further in depth/comprehensive assessments for those young people consenting to be part of the scheme and presenting with mental health, learning, communication difficulties or other vulnerabilities. The six pilot sites used a variety of screening and assessment tools. Examples include the Screening Questionnaire Interview for Adolescents (SQifA), the Health the Nation Outcome Scales for Adolescents (HoNOSCA), the Screening Interview for Adolescents (SifA), the NHS CAMHS Common Assessment Framework (CAF), the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaires (SDQ), the Structured Assessment of Violence Risk in Youth (SAVRY), the Juvenile Sex Offender Assessment Protocol II (J-SOAP II), the Psychopathy Checklist, Revised assessment (PCL-R) and the Learning Disability Screening Questionnaire (LDSQ).

This study demonstrates that the young people referred to the YJLD scheme have multiple interrelated complex needs, including social, psychological and mental health issues. Behavioural issues (69%), social problems (51.6%) and safeguarding concerns (36.8%) were the three most frequently identified problems. The average number of vulnerabilities was 3.6 (sd. 3) (1, 16), with the highest proportion of young people (80%) being identified as having between one and five vulnerabilities. Diagnosable mental health issues were identified in

15.4% of cases (n=158) and the largest proportion of suspected diagnosable mental health and developmental issues were linked to ADHD (39%), conduct disorder and autism (both at 19%).

Results indicate that the scheme has had some success referring the young people in need of further intervention to the appropriate services or providing them with a brief intervention through the YJLD project. For those young people who engaged with the scheme, the YJLD teams had an average of 2.26 (sd. 2.94; 0, 22) direct contacts including one to one appointments. However, there was little quantifiable information regarding the outcome of referrals onto other agencies (and the extent to which the identified needs were addressed). Although limited, there is some evidence pointing to successful referrals into CAMHS (n=25), Learning Disability services (n=18), Family/relationship Counselling (n=16) and Family Intervention and Parenting programmes (n=12 and n=8 respectively). It should be noted that the new diversion data gathering system collects such information and in the long term this will enable analysis with regards to the effectiveness of the scheme in terms of addressing the identified vulnerabilities.

The original model envisaged that the scheme would enable diversion from and within the youth justice system. Only two out of the six pilot schemes have systematically succeeded in influencing decisions relating to charge (e.g. Lewisham and RBKC), whereas in the other sites this has been more difficult to achieve systematically. Although the Webshare data were limited to self-reported impact on decision making, there is an indication that the YJLD teams had some success in supporting young people into mainstream or specialist services (21.5% of the total number of cases), more so than influencing sentencing or remand (15.2%). This is not surprising, given the difficulties of the scheme in accessing young people at the point of arrest and getting police commitment to the scheme (thus influencing decisions regarding charging and ultimately diverting away from the youth justice system).

6.2.Reoffending rates

The two main quantitative outcomes examined in the evaluation were reoffending rates and changes in identified (health) needs.

Reoffending was analysed in terms of both frequency and timing (length of desistance). With regard to frequency, when comparing the YJLD cohort (n=234 across all sites) with a matched (but non randomised) control group of young people in similar YOT areas (n=201 across all sites), results indicate no statistically significant differences in any comparison between pairs of matched sites in reoffending behaviour (in terms of rates and frequency of proven reoffending) in the 15 to 30 months subsequent to the index date which coincided with referral to intervention/control sites. This indicates that any difference between rates in intervention and control sites are not large enough to rule out chance or other factors as an explanation. Nevertheless, the results are positive in places but not conclusive (due to the methodological limitations highlighted above). This is typical of similar youth justice research showing mixed or unreliable results regarding the impact of diversionary interventions on recidivism (e.g. Gensheimer et al., 1986; Chapin and Griffin, 2005 and Schwalbe et al., 2011).

It is worth highlighting the following indicative results:

- Young people in Lewisham and Peterborough intervention sites were less likely to reoffend than their control, but these differences were not statistically significant.

- Young people in South Tees and Wolverhampton intervention sites were more likely to reoffend than their control group, but these differences were not statistically significant. Additionally, the sample size in Wolverhampton is too small to enable appropriate statistical analysis and draw valid conclusions.
- Young people in the Lewisham and Peterborough cohort appear to commit a higher number of offences than their control - but once again these results need further investigation, as they are limited by a small proportion of young people in Lewisham and Peterborough committing a high proportion of offences. This also indicates that the YJLD teams at these two sites are more likely to pick up and work with prolific young offenders.
- Young people with access to the scheme in Lewisham and Peterborough took significantly longer to reoffend.
- Young people accessing the YJLD scheme appear younger than in the comparator sites (on average a year younger, i.e. 14 vs. 15 years old). This is mainly because the four YJLD sites used in this comparison tend to pick up more 10 year olds than the YOTs. This is in line with the 'early intervention' approach of YJLD. However, age has been statistically controlled for in the analysis and the results reflect this.
- Similarly, the Peterborough and South Tees sites appear to pick up more prolific offenders than in the comparator sites. This is the case in Wolverhampton as well, but the numbers are too small to draw firm conclusions. There are no significant differences in previous offending in the other comparisons. Again, these differences were accounted for by using statistical control.

In conclusion, there are no significant differences in reoffending between any of the intervention and control sites, even after adjusting for differences in age at referral and offending history (age at first conviction and previous sanctioned offending).

With regard to the second approach to analysing reoffending rates, desistance, however, one particular positive (and statistically significant) result has emerged. Periods of desistance from offending by the YJLD clients were longer than the comparator group during the follow up period. A *delay to re-offence* raises the prospect of a lower total volume of re-offending cumulatively through the high-risk years of the lifespan (cf. the 'age-crime curve'), with associated reductions in distress and monetary costs; it also opens up the possibility of further intervention at a later stage (a 'booster'), further postponing any re-offence.

6.3.Mental health outcome measures

The second study sought to track levels of individual social/health need from a baseline (at first contact with the scheme) to a second point in time after exposure to the scheme. For this study, given the low overall sample size (n=37 at both time points) data were aggregated across all the sites to enable meaningful statistical analysis. There were statistically significant reductions in overall need, levels of depression and levels of self-harm and a significant association between improvements and the amount of YJLD contact. Even when the sites were analysed separately, statistically significant reductions in overall need were apparent in three of them (Halton & Warrington and South Tees and RBKC) which, given the small sample sizes (n=7-24) indicates a substantial effect. This signifies that there may be value in a further, larger-scale trial across more sites, possibly involving more intensive monitoring or other forms of data collection (including a larger total sample but also larger sub-samples at the separate sites, and possibly also a greater number of sites, including both intervention and control sites).

The combined findings of the mental health and wellbeing study and the reoffending study are suggestive of beneficial effects of diversion not only on mental health status but also on delaying and possibly reducing re-offending. While the latter effects were not statistically significant with regard to re-offence rates, there was a large average difference in time to re-offending, with the comparator sample doing so much earlier than the YJLD sample.

Whilst positive, these conclusions are tempered by the relatively modest sample size and the possibility that other factors may explain the changes observed. The findings are sufficiently positive to justify fuller investigation through further research that is both more extensive (encompassing a larger number of sites, both intervention and control) and intensive (entailing more detailed assessment and monitoring of change).

6.4. Cost effectiveness

The objective of the economic analysis was to identify the comparative costs and outcomes of the current scheme for young offenders with mental health issues, learning disabilities and other vulnerabilities with the YJLD scheme. As with the reoffending study which formed the basis for the economic analysis, the current data has limited predictive power over the longer term and the possibility of a simple delay in reoffending rather than a complete prevention must also be considered. Results are rather less positive at this stage, indicating that the total cost of reoffending are greater in the intervention than the control sites, although as argued within the report, this could be down to differences between the intervention and control cohorts (in terms of numbers included in each group, seriousness of offending and vulnerabilities).

There is also an indication that the impact is greater for vulnerable clients whose offending behaviour is not 'ingrained' and hence is still open to change. Effectively intervening with first time offenders through YJLD, therefore, appears to be more effective in preventing the development of attitudes and behaviour that cause offending in comparison to intervening in clients with previous offences in whom offending behaviour is likely to be more ingrained, although such a trend also is apparent with the YOT cohorts. Longer-term re-offending data is needed to compare the comparative effectiveness of the YJLD versus standard/YOT practice in preventing re-offending in first time offenders. The question of which children and young people the YJLD scheme should target cannot be addressed conclusively from the economic data collected. The schemes involvement is less intensive for the more serious offenders but as is shown in the case study, could still provide benefits and reduce costs both in the short and longer-term if the vulnerabilities are addressed and re-offending behaviour prevented.

Use of resource analysis (CA-SUS) indicates that there may be savings from the YJLD scheme in terms of avoiding school exclusion and costly alternative schooling arrangements, although more evidence would be needed to support this notion as the current sample is small. The data, although limited, suggest that individuals on the YJLD scheme seem to require more resources from the health sector in particular, than their non-YJLD counterparts. This is to be expected as previously unidentified vulnerabilities are managed. The suggestions of resource switching highlights an area to be looked into more closely in the future to ensure the YJLD scheme is evaluated on the basis of all that it impacts. An increased requirement for NHS and social services resources may look costly in the short-term but resource-efficient over the longer-term. The economic dilemma is whether or not to intervene early to identify vulnerabilities and, therefore, to incur the increased costs of treatment and management of such vulnerabilities that would have otherwise remained

undetected but that may, if untreated, increase the risk of future offending and thus future state costs (Knapp, 1997).

In summary the cost imposed on society of allowing a young person's offending behaviour to develop unchecked is significant both in financial and social terms. It has been estimated that a 'career criminal' will impose a discounted lifetime cost of approximately £335,000 (including £80,000 public sector cost) on society (NEF, 2010). Thus the cost of getting it wrong (non-intervention or intervening ineffectively and inappropriately) and hence allowing vulnerable young offenders to 'progress' to become career criminals is enormous. In addition the intangible burden placed on the offender and their family can lead to family breakdown, physical and mental ill health and suicide. A service such as YJLD with a clearly defined target population and sensitively integrated into existing local structures of service provision for vulnerable young offenders offers long term potential cost savings that are likely to far outweigh the cost of providing the service-you can finance a large number of YJLD interventions from the cost savings associated with diverting one vulnerable young client away from a lifetime of crime. However, evaluation of the long-term costs and benefits of the scheme is essential before any judgements can be made on its cost-effectiveness.

6.5.Children and young people's views

The qualitative insights provided both by the children and young people and the professionals provide a number of important messages.

All of the children and young people interviewed live in families enduring profound social strain within areas of multiple socio-economic deprivation. Taken together, they represent an identifiable group of young people with multiple manifest vulnerabilities. Despite such commonality, however, the children and young people also comprise a diverse and highly heterogeneous group with regard to mental health status and broader hidden vulnerabilities. Whilst there is evidence of myriad vulnerabilities - and some of the young people had been referred to CAMHS - a significant proportion have no apparent diagnosable mental health and developmental problems. To balance this many children and young people interviewed articulated difficulties in controlling anger, often with violent consequences.

Beyond mental health services, many of the children and young people report having had contact with, and/or receiving services from a panoply of professional agencies. Some report positive benefit from such interventions, several articulated disappointment and feelings of having been 'let down' and some even perceived intervention from professional agencies as an antagonistic presence.

Whatever the precise nature of the children's personal circumstances and/or their contact with professional agencies, it is clear that the youth justice apparatus is not equipped to address their needs and is more likely to impose an iatrogenic effect. Strategic, systematic, consistent and rigorously applied diversion is clearly an appropriate and, almost certainly, more effective policy and practice response.

6.6.Staff and key stakeholders' views

Whilst local variations in youth justice systems have produced a range of differentiated practices within and across the YJLD pilot schemes, *all* of the professional staff interviewed recognised the importance and value of diversion.

For some of the sites obtaining an effective, systematic and simple referral process has been extremely difficult and this has delayed progress. Indeed, the greatest barrier to the implementation of the YJLD scheme derived from different competing priorities and agendas of partners involved in the delivery of the project. A particular barrier was the police ethos and practice based on sanction detection targets, leading to difficulties in securing police co-operation at both strategic and operational levels. Different areas have, therefore, experienced in practice different degrees of 'buy in' from partners, even though all signed up originally to the scheme. In some of the sites there was dissonance between ostensible senior level police support for the initiative and operational implementation in practice.

In a minority of sites the YJLD scheme benefitted from very good police referral mechanisms from the start where strong relationships with the police existed prior to the introduction of YJLD. In particular where triage was operating successfully it formed a very good basis for YJLD. Effective referral mechanisms to the YJLD scheme are critical for its success.

In the main the YJLD sites had established good relationships with CAMHS and were able to refer young people with some certainty that they would be provided with a service. In cases where it is appropriate and necessary, relationships with CAMHS were seen as essential to addressing mental health, learning disabilities and specific vulnerabilities for young people referred to YJLD.

There was universal support for making diversion a more systematic or compulsory element within police practice and a strong expression of opinion that the police should be trained to identify, appreciate and understand the significance of mental health issues in young people.

6.7.Recommendations

While the present results cannot be regarded as definitive, they point in an encouraging direction. The possibility is raised of identifying examples of good practice within the existing provision, and illustrating what this entails for the benefit of agencies more widely. The results presented here are not sufficient in themselves to create a reliable transferable evidence-base YJLD model that could be applied in any new YJLD site but a number of promising approaches can be identified. These are mirrored in the eleven policy, practice and research recommendations presented in detail in the report and summarised below:

- Develop a clear and uniform diversion policy and practice
- Integrate diversion scheme with existing services
- Facilitate appropriate training to YJLD staff
- Promote systematic screening and assessment
- Match interventions to YP's characteristics
- Incorporate youth diversion into police practice
- Promote an outreach, family and community centred approach
- Monitor progress and effectiveness
- Encourage dissemination of current results
- Develop an evidence-based ethos
- Conduct further research to boost sample size, statistical power and generalisability of findings. The research would explore changes in identified needs, reoffending and cost effectiveness and service users' views and satisfaction.