



# Effective practice guide

## **Out-of-court disposals**

Based on a joint inspection of the effectiveness of diverting children from the criminal justice system: meeting needs, ensuring safety, and preventing reoffending

**October 2025**

# Acknowledgements

This effective practice guide is based on information sourced while undertaking His Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation and His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) joint thematic inspection '*the effectiveness of diverting children from the criminal justice system: meeting needs, ensuring safety, and preventing reoffending*' and work arising from key lines of enquiry. The inspection was led by HM inspector Maria Jerram, supported by a team of inspectors and operations, research, communications and corporate staff. User Voice undertook interviews with service users. The manager responsible for this inspection programme is Helen Davies.

In collaboration with Helen Amor, effective practice lead, Maria Jerram (HM Inspectorate of Probation) and Ian Elliott (HMICFRS) have drawn out examples of effective practice (where we see our standards delivered well in practice) across organisational delivery and case supervision. These are presented in this guide, to support the continuous development of case managers, senior practitioners, team managers and senior leaders.

We would like to thank all those who participated in any way in this inspection, and especially those who have contributed to this guide. Without their help and cooperation, the inspection and effective practice guide would not have been possible.

Please note that, throughout the report, the names in the practice examples have been changed, to protect the individual's identity.

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The guide is aimed at a range of audiences; it is intended to support [case managers](#), [senior practitioners](#), [team managers](#), and [senior leaders](#) to reflect on their own experiences and consider how they may apply the learning points in their own contexts. Therefore, please use the contents page to navigate directly to relevant sections.

# Introduction

## About this guide

His Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation has a duty to identify and disseminate effective practice.<sup>1</sup>

We assure the quality of youth justice and probation provision and test its effectiveness. Critically, we make recommendations designed to highlight and disseminate best practice, challenge poor performance and encourage providers to improve.

This guide highlights where we have seen our standards delivered well for children subject to out-of-court disposals in the youth justice system. It is designed to help police and youth justice services improve their diversionary work with children.

I am grateful to all the areas that participated in this review, and for their additional help in producing this guide. We publish these guides to complement our reports and the standards against which we inspect youth justice and probation.

I hope this guide will be of interest to everyone working in police and youth justice services and seeking to improve their practice. We welcome feedback on this and our other guides, to ensure that they are as useful as possible to future readers.



**Martin Jones CBE**

HM Chief Inspector of Probation



## Contact us



We would love to hear what you think of this guide. Please send your comments and feedback on this guide, including its impact and any suggested improvements, to [Helen.amor@hmiprobation.gov.uk](mailto:Helen.amor@hmiprobation.gov.uk)

## Finding your way



Useful links and tools



External video



HM Inspectorate of Probation  
recorded interview

<sup>1</sup> **For adult services** – Section 7 of the *Criminal Justice and Court Services Act (2000)*, as amended by the *Offender Management Act (2007)*, section 12(3)(a). **For youth services** – inspection and reporting on youth offending teams is established under section 39 of the *Crime and Disorder Act (1998)*.

# Background

Youth Justice Services (YJSs) were established by the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 to prevent offending by children through local partnerships. The Act introduced reprimands and final warnings, which had an 'escalator effect' leading to harsher penalties for repeated offences (Goldson, 2000).

By 2007, youth criminal justice caseloads peaked but have since declined as YJSs shifted focus to out-of-court cases. The Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012 (LASPO 2012) introduced youth cautions, youth conditional cautions, and voluntary community resolutions to address low-level offences early and avoid criminalising children.

In 2018, HM Inspectorate of Probation and HM Inspectorate of Constabulary, Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) inspected the delivery of out-of-court disposals (OoCD) by YJSs. They found effective diversion of children from the criminal justice system (CJS) for low-level offences and made 11 recommendations, emphasising victim considerations and evaluating OoCD effectiveness.



You can find the full report here: [Out-of-court disposal work in youth offending teams](#)

Since then, OoCD use has increased, and is the largest percentage of casework in many YJSs. Aggregated core data from youth inspections between 2021-2024 showed that most OoCD practices were rated 'Good', with strong efforts to promote desistance. However, significant variations exist in OoCD processes across areas, including differences in the types of disposals used, the amount of disposal children can receive, and approaches to issues such as knife crime and motoring offences. These disparities raise concerns about a 'postcode lottery' affecting fair opportunities and outcomes for children.

A recent report from the Youth Endowment Fund (YEF) (2025) which was co-authored by the Centre for Justice Innovation has a dedicated focus on the early stages of the youth justice system and the processes of which children and young people experience, including diversion from all formal outcomes and formal OoCD. It highlighted that OoCDs are an effective way to deal with lower-level and first-time offences committed by children. The report emphasised that OoCDs can be beneficial in reducing reoffending and avoiding the stigmatisation associated with formal court proceedings. However, as found in our thematic inspections, the research also noted that these disposals should be used consistently and equitably across different regions, police force areas and from practitioner to practitioner to ensure fair treatment for all children. The report aimed to provide national guidance aimed at supporting police forces and YJSs across England and Wales.



Follow this link, [Diversion Practice Guidance | Youth Endowment Fund](#) to access the report which aims to provide guidance to police officers, practitioners and partners at all levels of organisations. The report makes seven recommendations on how to effectively divert children away from the CJS in an effective, consistent and equitable way.

The guidance should be read in conjunction with the following national guidance discussed in the [policy context](#) section below.

## Policy context

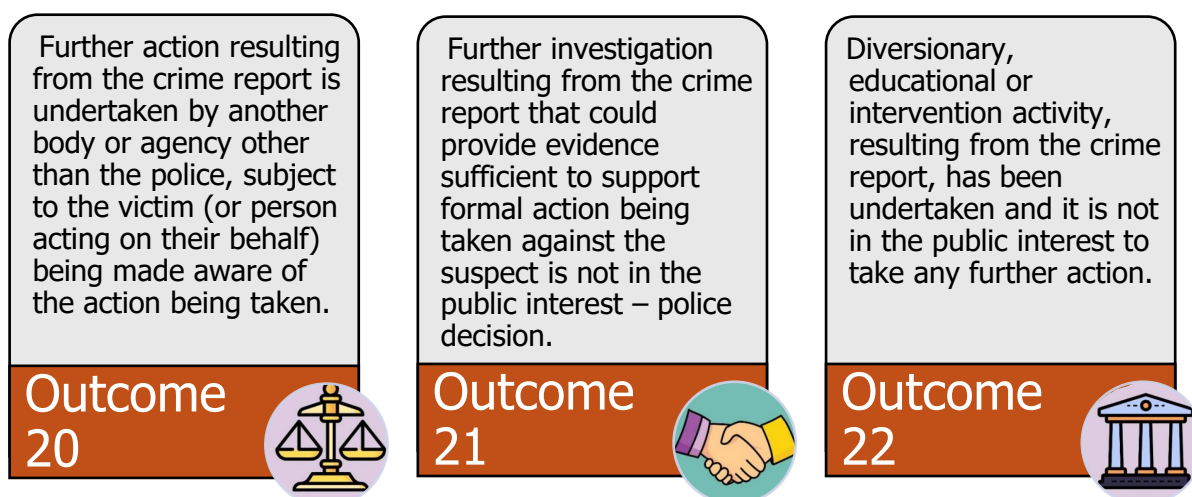
The policy context surrounding YJSs and OoCDs emphasises consistency and fairness in the justice system, supported by tools such as the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) [child gravity matrix](#) and the updated Youth Justice Board (YJB) [case management guidance](#). The NPCC matrix serves as a triage tool for police, guiding proportionate responses to youth offending based on offence severity and other key factors, thereby helping to avoid unnecessary criminalisation of children. Complementing this, the YJB guidance provides a comprehensive framework for youth justice case managers, covering areas such as supervision, safeguarding, restorative justice, and relationship building, all aimed at upholding standards, supporting children, and reducing reoffending. Together, these resources promote a more equitable and standardised approach across regions.

The new nationwide [YJB prevention and diversion assessment tool \(PDAT\)](#) standardises how OoCDs are assessed and planned for, ensuring consistent, effective, and fair youth justice decisions across regions.

## Diversionary activities

Diversionary activities used by police forces include:

- **Community resolutions (CRs):** Informal options to resolve offences, often involving restorative justice. They do not require arrest and are not recorded on the police national computer (PNC) but can appear in enhanced disclosure and barring service (DBS) checks<sup>2</sup>. CRs can include intervention conditions, but these are not enforceable.
- **Outcome codes:** Used by police to record out-of-court disposals. CRs require the child to admit guilt, while Outcome 22 does not. Police have increasingly used outcome codes to close cases, including those detailed on the diagram below:



<sup>2</sup> Disclosure Barring Service (DBS) check is a way for employers to check a candidate/employee's criminal record to help them decide whether they are suitable and safe for a role. In simple terms, a DBS check is a process used in England and Wales, to identify relevant offences spent and/or unspent in an individual's criminal record. The depth of the check will vary depending on the role, but the [four main DBS checks](#) are Basic, Standard, Enhanced and Enhanced with Barred List(s) ([About us – Disclosure and Barring Service – GOV.UK](#))

- **Youth cautions (YCs):** Formal notices recorded on the PNC, part of a child's criminal record. They require the child to admit the offence and can involve YJS support.
- **Youth conditional cautions (YCCs):** For more serious offences than CRs, offering rehabilitation instead of prosecution. Non-compliance can lead to formal judicial action.

These measures aim to intervene early, avoid court appearances, and to support children outside of the justice system.

There was limited up-to-date research on the effectiveness or cost-effectiveness of the differing types of OoCD, including which types of OoCD might work best with which children, considering children's differing histories and circumstances. However, the available research broadly indicates the following:

1. **Reduced reoffending** – there are indications that OoCDs, especially when paired with appropriate interventions, are more effective than court proceedings in reducing reoffending, particularly for low to medium-level offences or for those children without entrenched offending behaviour. (HM Inspectorate of Probation, 2023d).
2. **Holistic and child-centred approach** – effective OoCDs can tackle root causes like trauma and unmet needs through tailored support, aligning with the YJB's Child First approach and often involving restorative justice, family input, and access to key services (YJB, 2024b).
3. **Positive engagement and outcomes** – diversion programmes, especially voluntary ones, worked best when children were sufficiently engaged and motivated to take part. Marshall (HM Inspectorate of Probation, 2023c) stressed that a young person's willingness to get involved was key to making these approaches successful. Children and families report positive OoCD experiences, especially when they feel heard and supported by trusted professionals delivering meaningful, development-focused interventions (HM Inspectorate of Probation, 2023c).
4. **Efficiency and system benefits** – Centre for Justice Innovation (2022) highlighted that OoCDs offer a quicker, more cost-effective response to low-level youth offending, easing pressure on courts. Multi-agency panels improve consistency, coordination, and outcomes by enabling joint decision-making.

# Our standards: what we looked for and our expectations



The examples in this guide are drawn from evidence of effective practice identified while undertaking fieldwork for the thematic inspection.

We define effective practice as:



*"where we see our standards delivered well in practice, with our standards being based on established models and frameworks, which are grounded in evidence, learning, and experience."*

We identified effective practice against our thematic standards listed below:

- Governance and leadership arrangements drive a high-quality service to achieve positive change and safety for children and communities.
- Well-defined OoCD processes and effective multi-agency partnerships support timely and appropriate diversion of children from the formal justice system, with actions to achieve positive change and keep children and the community safe.
- Staff are empowered to deliver high-quality, personalised and responsive services to achieve positive change and keep children and the community safe.
- Effective relationships and arrangements with partner agencies ensure access to responsive services and interventions that drive positive change and keep children and communities safe in the delivery of out-of-court disposals.
- Timely and relevant information is available, and appropriate facilities are in place to support a high-quality, personalised and responsive approach for children who receive an out of court disposal.

[You can read our thematic inspection report here.](#)



## Reflection questions

### **Thinking about your practice as a leader and/or case manager working with children on OoCD:**

#### **From a strategic perspective:**

- How would you assess your area's work with children on OoCD against these standards and what could be improved?
- How well do you understand the profile and needs of children on OoCD?
- What gaps have you identified?

#### **From an operational perspective:**

- What practices are effective and ineffective in your area when working with children on OoCD?
- Do training and development programmes equip staff to appropriately assess, plan and work with children on OoCD?

# Learning from children



We commissioned User Voice, a charity run by people who have lived experience of the CJS, to gather the views of children, ensuring the research was peer-led at every stage.

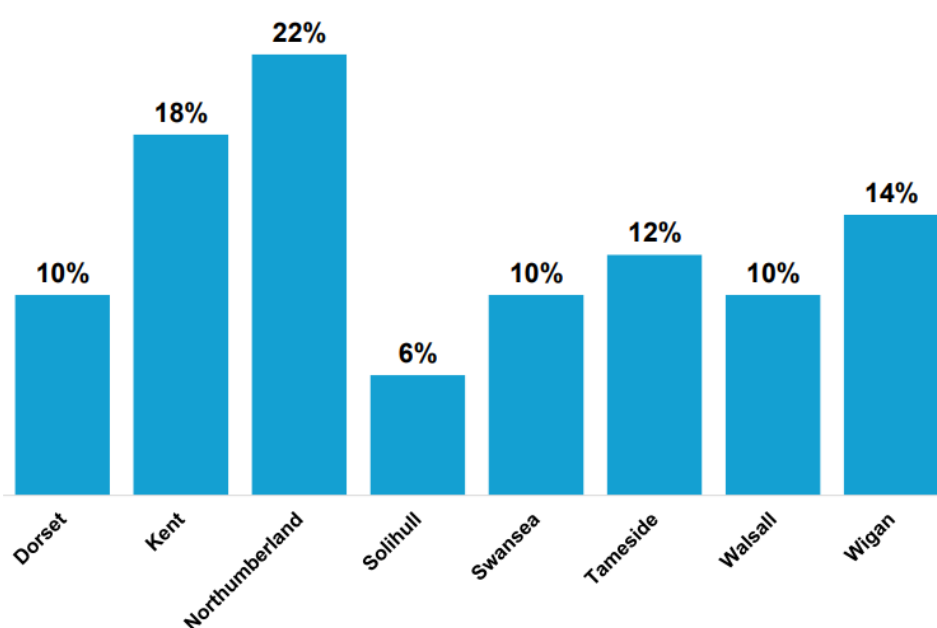
User Voice gathered the views of 51 children to understand their experiences. We are grateful for the insights of those children whose feedback we have used to inform the findings of the thematic inspection.

The overall objective of the consultation was to better understand children's experience with OoCD and whether they meet their needs:

- **Support** – What help they received (or did not) during their OoCD
- **Understanding** – How well they understood what the OoCD meant for them
- **Relationships** – The quality of their relationship with their YJS worker
- **Impact** – Whether they felt the OoCD would help them not to offend in the future.

## WHO DID WE GIVE A VOICE TO?

### PARTICIPANT BREAKDOWN BY REGION



\*Some charts may total to over 100% due to rounding.

Figure 1: Participant breakdown

Fifty-five per cent of participants were neurodivergent, with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and autism being the most prevalent conditions. Many 12–18 years olds reported that the YJS staff helped them understand their OoCD and what it meant for them.

*“They explained it all to me. Yeah. For the out-of-court disposal, I did sign something, yeah, I do remember.”*

*“Yeah. They explained everything to me, and I could ask some questions if I didn't understand something.”*

Children reported engaging more frequently in informal social activities, such as going out for fast food, ice cream, or bowling than attending structured support programmes. These ‘fun’ activities were particularly valued for helping to build trust, strengthen relationships, and create a comfortable environment where children felt more at ease.

Such intentional use of play and activity can support the early stages of the Trauma Recovery Model (TRM)<sup>3</sup>, laying the groundwork for more direct, offence-related interventions (Skuse and Matthew, 2015). These early engagements can be transformational for children subject to OoCDs.

Effective relationship-based practice depends on case managers who are empathetic, consistent, respectful, and optimistic. These qualities are essential for implementing the TRM approach, particularly in its initial phases, where trust-building and emotional regulation are key. While there is no single model, sustained, child-centred engagement is fundamental to fostering trust and supporting long-term change (HM Inspectorate of Probation, 2003c). (See [OoCD intervention activities](#) section for examples.)



[The Trauma Recovery Model is explained here in more detail.](#)



[Using a SportPlus approach to improve support and outcomes for young people in or at risk of entering the Youth Justice System](#) is a report focusing combining fun, structured activities with mentoring and trauma-informed support, helps build trust, confidence, and positive relationships, aiming to reduce offending and improve life outcomes.

This approach supported young people in feeling safe, understood, and ready to engage.

*“She took us for ice cream and everything. I was loving me life. She took us on drives and everything. It was quite fun ... and I think that makes people feel more comfortable as well.”*

*“Well, actually, yeah, because we've got some walks coming up. Like, I don't know if they're sponsoring it, but we've got some walks. ... We're going to the Lake District next.”*

*“[I attended] groups ... around emotional and mental wellbeing and resilience. Also do boxing on Monday night. I've now got other professionals that I see regularly, twice a week. I've got a group I go to on Tuesdays. I made some friends.”*

HM Inspectorate of Probation (2023c) described how positive, trusting relationships are the most consistently cited factor in research for improving outcomes for children at risk of or involved in offending. All participants in the User Voice research reported strong

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<sup>3</sup> The Trauma Recovery Model (TRM) is a trauma-informed framework developed by Dr Tricia Skuse and Jonny Matthew. It is designed to help professionals understand the psychological needs that underpin challenging behaviours in children and young people, particularly those with complex histories of trauma and adversity ([The-Trauma-Recovery-Model.pdf](#)).

relationships with their YJS worker and this was noted as the most positive thing. Factors which led to children feeling this way were:

- non-judgemental workers
- genuine care
- helpful advice
- understanding and awareness.

Many felt their YJS worker helped them feel understood and supported, often going beyond formal duties to build trust and rapport. Some described their workers as mentors who offered helpful advice and contributed to their personal development. However, a few children noted challenges with having multiple YJS workers, which led to confusion and the need to repeatedly explain their circumstances. Consistency in staffing was highlighted as an area for improvement.

*“She’s really great. She comes to my house. we speak about what happened and we speak about how we can improve in the future. She was professional but she wasn’t like uptight.”*

*“Worked with her [YJS worker] before the OoCD because my mental health was really bad at the time, and I was running away ... Actually, she listens. She doesn’t look at you like you’re stupid, like you’re a little kid; she talks to you like you’re on the same level.”*

*“[YJS worker] was helpful, because I actually listened to him. Which is what got me to be here ... cause most people, all the other workers, I’m just like ‘yeah, whatever’. But I decided to listen to him, and because he spoke to me on a level ...”*

Please refer to the [further reading](#) section to access additional reading around the importance of relationships, for all professionals, when working with children.



[This report from User Voice explains its methodology and findings in full](#)



## Reflection questions

### Reflecting on this section:

- How do you ensure that you capture the voice of children in your service delivery and interventions?
- Consider the findings above, and think about how you demonstrate them within your practice?
- What could you do differently to strengthen your approach in relation to each of the key areas shown above?

# Organisational delivery

## Key take-aways



### Delivery of effective OoCD activity requires:



**Strong governance structures**, such as joint decision-making involving YJSs, police, and other partners, help ensure that OoCDs are applied consistently and fairly. HM Inspectorate of Probation standards on core inspections state: *"We expect to see clear joint protocols with the police in place, which set out locally agreed policy and practice, including joint and defensible decision-making"*. (HM Inspectorate of Probation, 2023a)



**Governance frameworks** embed a child-first, trauma-informed approach by ensuring that policies and practices reflect the needs and voices of children. This includes listening to feedback, involving children in decision-making, and ensuring interventions are proportionate and supportive (HM Inspectorate of Probation, 2020).



**Strategic direction and oversight**, ensuring that OoCDs align with local and national priorities, such as early intervention and diversion from the formal justice system. Governance mechanisms like 'scrutiny panels' promote transparency and accountability by reviewing decisions and outcomes, however research shows they differ in effectiveness (HM Inspectorate of Probation, 2023b p.32).



**Setting standards, monitoring performance, and driving continuous improvement.** Core inspections have highlighted the importance of leadership in embedding evidence-based practice and ensuring that OoCDs involve meaningful intervention (HM Inspectorate of Probation, 2020).



**Multi-agency collaboration**, ensuring that all partners, police, education, children's services, and health work together effectively, share information appropriately, and contribute to holistic assessments and the delivery of interventions.

# Leadership and governance

## Example of effectiveness: OoCD evaluation process across the partnership, Dorset

Dorset combined YJS (DCYJS), in collaboration with Dorset Police, developed a robust and innovative approach to evaluating the impact of OoCDs. This practice moved beyond traditional metrics by incorporating a broader, more nuanced understanding of reoffending and outcomes.

### Key features of the approach:

- **Comprehensive data analysis:** DCYJS recognised that conviction data alone does not fully reflect the effectiveness of OoCDs. They disaggregated data by disposal type and included softer outcomes to gain a fuller picture of impact.
- **Overcoming data barriers:** A significant challenge was accessing reoffending data for children who had turned 18 years old. DCYJS overcame this by securing agreement with Dorset Police to share data from the PNC which involved:
  - Identifying young people who turned 18 years old within the cohort.
  - Seconded police officers retrieving conviction data from PNC.
  - Analysing offence type, date, and outcome in relation to previous offences.
  - Conducting comparative analysis of reoffending rates across key demographic and contextual factors, including care status, SEND, ethnicity, age, and gender.
- **Cross-agency leadership:** The initiative was driven by senior leadership, including the head of service and managers, who worked at board level to secure access to necessary data and ensure strategic alignment.
- **Addressing gaps in data:** DCYJS acknowledged limitations in tracking children who moved out of area, particularly those not in local authority care. They assessed that these gaps were likely evenly distributed across disposal types, maintaining the integrity of comparative analysis.

This approach enabled DCYJS to better understand the effectiveness of OoCDs, tailor interventions based on detailed reoffending patterns, promote fairness and consistency in decision-making and influence strategic planning through evidence-based insights.

This work exemplifies effective partnership with police, addressing data protection and operational barriers to enable more accurate and meaningful evaluation.



### Reflection questions

- Are OoCD decisions and data scrutinised in your area routinely at strategic and operational levels by the YJS management team, staff, and relevant partners?
- What mechanisms are in place to ensure confidence that an OoCD is the most appropriate disposal for a child?

# Partnerships and services

Effective OoCDs rely on strong, multi-agency partnerships that can respond to the complex needs of children in contact with the police. Our thematic inspection found that YJSs often benefit from co-located specialist staff and established links with mainstream, specialist, and third-sector providers, enabling tailored interventions.

However, access to key services, particularly mental health and neurodivergence support, is often limited by high thresholds and long waiting lists. For many children, the OoCD is their first opportunity to receive help, making the role of YJSs and their partners especially important given the short duration of many disposals and the complex backgrounds of the children involved.

Across inspected areas, there was a shared commitment to a welfare-based, child-centred approach. We saw strong examples of partnership working, including creative interventions and effective use of funding streams like the Turnaround programme to support delivery.

This section highlights promising practice where collaboration between police, YJSs, health, education, and the voluntary sector led to meaningful outcomes. These models showed how early intervention, shared intelligence, and continuity of care can reduce reoffending, improve wellbeing, and ensure children receive the right support at the right time.

## Police

The examples below highlight the effective police-led practice found during our inspection.



### **Example of effectiveness:** Police-led liaison with YJS for community resolutions, Dorset

Effective practice in youth justice increasingly relies on strong collaboration between police and YJSs in the delivery of OoCDs. Police play a pivotal role in identifying suitable cases, contributing to joint decision-making panels (JDMP), and ensuring that safeguarding and victim perspectives are fully considered.

During the inspection, Dorset Police was highlighted by HMICFRS for its structured approach to considering and assessing suitability of delivering OoCDs for children. The force implemented a process whereby police officers did not issue any community resolutions involving a child without referring to a dedicated police sergeant who performed a filtering function. The sergeant reviewed each case using the NPCC Child Gravity Matrix, to assess the seriousness of the offence, available evidence, any history of offending the child's personal circumstances and any welfare concerns. The sergeant made independent decisions on cases deemed suitable for a 'street CR' and returned the case to the officer in charge<sup>4</sup> (OiC) to deliver an OoCD. For repeat, and more serious offences, the child was

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<sup>4</sup> OiC – The officer in the case is the police officer responsible for managing and progressing a specific investigation. They are the main point of contact for the case and are accountable for gathering evidence, liaising

referred to the YJS for an assessment and a final agreement of the disposal decision at JDMP. All decisions and rationale were recorded using a C413 form and shared across relevant services. This ensured transparency and accountability, with clear records including victim impact statements and early restorative justice considerations.

This process ensured that:

- **No child received a CR without oversight** from the YJS, early help, and a senior police supervisor.
- **Only one CR could be issued**, after which a full YJS assessment was required.
- The **gravity matrix was consistently applied, and a child personal needs (CPN) assessment** was always completed.
- **Restorative justice** was embedded early, which contributed to high levels of victim engagement. Evidence from the YEF (2021) shows restorative justice can have a moderate impact on reducing reoffending by approximately 13 per cent, especially when used alongside traditional prosecution rather than as a replacement.

This model provided a consistent, auditable, and child-centred approach to OoCDs, balancing the needs of the child, the victim, and public safety.

### **Example of effectiveness:** Prevention, prosecution, intervention, education, divert (PPIED) panel, Wigan

The PPIED panel was an innovative early intervention model observed working effectively in Wigan. Designed to identify and support children who are at risk of entering the CJS before they met the threshold for an OoCD.

The PPIED panel, an early intervention model, was introduced in Greater Manchester Police in 2020. The PPIED panel was designed to identify and support children who were at risk of entering the CJS before they met the threshold for an OoCD. This panel was observed to be working especially effectively in Wigan.

Recognising that repeated police contact could be an early indicator of a child's trajectory toward the CJS, the PPIED panel intervened at a pre-formal disposal stage. This approach aligned with the [Children and Young Persons Policing Strategy 2024-2027](#), and shifted the focus from reactive responses to proactive engagement. By addressing the underlying reasons for police contact, the PPIED panel reduced the need for OoCDs through earlier, more targeted support.

Key features include:

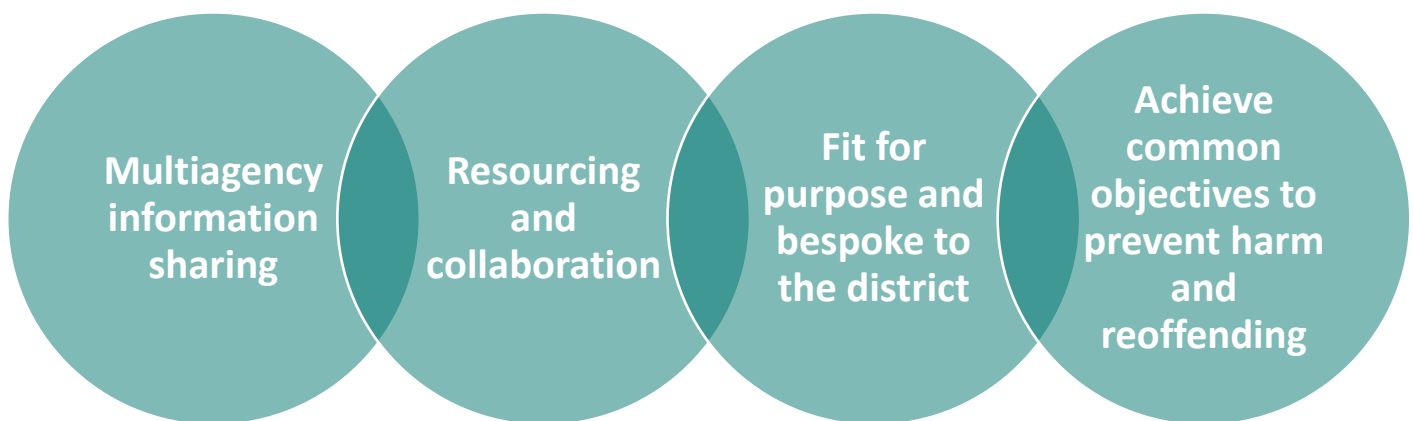
- **Tailored support** based on shared intelligence from agencies such as YJS, education, and health.
- **Voluntary engagement** with services such as Turnaround, Remedi, and STEER, offering mentoring, mental health support, and access to education or positive activities.

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with victims and witnesses, and ensuring that the case is prepared for any necessary legal proceedings or diversionary outcomes (such as an OoCD) ([Roles and Responsibilities | CPS](#)).

- **Continuity of care**, ensuring that if a child later receives an OoCD, they continued working with the same trusted professionals.
- **Target group** of children aged 14–17, often involved in offences such as criminal damage, public order, or violence with injury.

With eligibility criteria that a child must have been linked to more than one crime in the last 12 months and was not open to any other services, the weekly panel brought together police, YJSs, and partner agencies including, child and adolescent mental health (CAMHS), restorative justice, substance misuse, mentoring and education. They shared intelligence, understood the child's needs, and offered timely, voluntary support, making "invisible" children visible. When themes were identified, bespoke offers were implemented. For example, the development of 12-week girls only programme, following an increase in girls coming to the attention of the police.



**Figure 2: Focus of the PPIED scheme**

Records were maintained on local management systems, with Turnaround workers logging data on YJSs platforms and Greater Manchester Police contributing to evaluation efforts.

The model has gained national attention, and HM inspectors were advised that the Home Office (young futures hubs and prevention partnerships) and the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) were advocating for a national rollout.

A bespoke evaluation was underway in partnership with the College of Policing to further evidence its impact and inform best practice at the time of the thematic inspection. However, data analysis by Greater Manchester police indicated that over 300 children had been supported to date following police contact, many of whom were previously not engaged with support services. These children were at risk of escalating needs and repeated involvement with the police and YJSs.

The PPIED scheme showed positive outcomes in reducing future offending and police contact, improved mental health and wellbeing, reintegration into education and positive activities and support for substance misuse issues.



The [youth justice resource hub](#) and the [College of Policing](#) both provide more detail and share resources on the PPIED approach.

# Health

## **Example of effectiveness:** Positive health pathway service (PHPS), Wigan

The Greater Manchester positive health pathways service (PHPS) shows how integrated, trauma-informed practice can strengthen exit planning and long-term outcomes for children within the CJS across Greater Manchester.

During the thematic inspection it was found that many children enter the YJS with health needs, with research showing that these issues can be linked to how they become involved in crime (HM Inspectorate of Probation et al., 2023). They then exit the YJS without their health needs being met, often due to short intervention timeframes and long waiting lists for specialist services. This gap leaves children at increased risk of unmet needs and reoffending. Following a two-year scoping project, PHPS was established to prevent children from *"falling off cliff edges"* in service provision. The approach was embedded in Greater Manchester's wider commitment to trauma-informed policing, restorative justice, and diversion from the CJS wherever appropriate.

Operating across all 10 Greater Manchester districts, the service provide the following:

- **early health assessments** (typically within four weeks)
- **consultation, formulation, and brief interventions**
- worked **independently of criminal justice timeframes**, ensuring children continue to receive support beyond the point of disposal.

Referrals predominantly came via a weekly YJS, and police led [PPPIED](#) panel. Children aged 10–18 who have had any form of police contact, regardless of outcome, were eligible. The service was NHS-funded and worked in partnership with YJSs, liaison and diversion teams, the wider [REACH](#) service and children's social care. At the time of the inspection, PHPS was receiving 21–25 referrals per month, with increasing demand highlighting the success of the service.

In Wigan, the service was particularly valued for its role in brokering access to wider health and wellbeing support, including CAMHS, speech and language therapists (SaLTs), and peer or family-based interventions.

PHPS was used extensively and effectively, with case manager feedback highlighting the strength of local partnerships and the service's ability to coordinate complex care pathways. It also contributed to exit planning and prevention strategies, ensuring that children were not only diverted from the justice system but were supported holistically.

*"PHPS [were] the missing piece of our jigsaw ... The pathways into services and diagnosis are quicker, giving the children that we work with a better service whilst they are open to Youth Justice."*

*(Youth justice worker, Wigan)*

Evidence from the YEF supported this approach, showing that trauma-specific therapies can reduce crime and violence by 45 per cent, while cognitive behavioural therapy was shown to reduce crime by 27 per cent, particularly for children with greater justice system contact

(YEF, 2022). This model demonstrated how health-led, early intervention could reduce reliance on formal disposals, support effective exit planning, and improve long-term outcomes for vulnerable children.



[This leaflet is handed to children and clearly explains the offer in an easy and accessible format](#)

The case below highlights the critical role of the PHPS in identifying and addressing complex, unmet health needs that contribute to persistent offending.

### Case illustration

Oscar, a 14-year-old male, received an OoCD for two unprovoked assaults on teachers, reflecting a pattern of aggression, particularly towards women, and complex emotional and neurodivergent needs. Despite previous support via the [PPPIED](#) pathway, he had reoffended and struggled to engage with services.

#### Inspectors found:

- *Evidence of co-production with Oscar and his parent, with the assessment period extended to support meaningful engagement and analysis of needs.*
- *Diversity and neurodivergent needs were well considered – the case manager gained a deeper understanding of Oscar's needs within four weeks than previous services had.*
- *Strong professional engagement during assessment, going beyond existing case records.*
- *Unmet health needs were identified as a key barrier to desistance. A delayed Forensic (F)CAMHS referral was progressed via the PHPS, enabling support for neurodivergent and gender identity concerns.*
- *Although Oscar was open to children social care (CSC), the YJS led on coordinating health and safeguarding responses effectively.*

**Outcome:** The intervention led to timely health assessments and improved coordination through the PHPS. The FCAMHS assessment identified ongoing needs, and YJS step-down planning ensured continuity of support. The intervention helped establish early stability for Oscar, with plans in place for continued support beyond YJS involvement.

### Example of effectiveness: Speech and language therapists (SaLTs), Dorset

The DCYJS has employed SaLTs in its team since 2018, with additional capacity added through Turnaround funding to support children on OoCDs. Assessments showed that over 80 per cent of children entering the service had speech, language, and communication needs, with more than 30 per cent experiencing significant difficulties. These needs often affected their ability to understand instructions, express themselves, and engage with professionals. This contributed to behaviours such as avoidance, verbal aggression, and disengagement.

The DCYJS SaLTs assessed each child's communication profile and provided tailored advice to the child, their family, and professionals. Ninety-four per cent of children assessed were

below the expected level in the test for 'understanding spoken paragraphs'. DCYJS therefore moved away from talking-based interventions. A wide range of visual tools, such as comic strips, easy-read materials, and communication passports were used to support understanding and were shared across agencies including police, courts, and education. What set the DCYJS approach apart was its strong partnership with the NHS, which enabled a free flow of information, ensuring that SaLTs, who were NHS-employed, could link children directly into wider health services.

DCYJS was funding a two-year programme, 're-engage', through which therapists worked with schools, helping to build trust with children, engage them meaningfully, and work with them through informed consent. This was particularly important when supporting children with challenging behaviour in secondary school. This proactive, school-based model aimed to prevent children from entering the YJS altogether. The SaLTs team also delivered training across sectors, including to police, probation, magistrates, and volunteers to raise awareness. Advice and support on communicating effectively with children who have language learning difficulties was provided, alongside coaching to implement the strategies into practice.

Looking ahead, DCYJS planned to enhance the screening process for OoCDs, ensuring all children with weapon offences receive SaLTs input, and to collaborate further with NHS partners to improve custody resources and secondary support networks. This integrated, trauma-informed model was recognised as one of the strongest during our thematic inspection and demonstrated how early identification and tailored communication support can prevent exclusion, reduce reoffending, and improve long-term outcomes for vulnerable children. This aligns with recent guidance from the YEF (2024) which highlighted that keeping children in education was a key protective factor against crime and violence and recommended system-wide efforts to strengthen school inclusion.

## OoCD intervention activities

In this section, we highlight some of the innovation and creativity observed while on inspection to provide services and support to children who receive OoCD across England and Wales. The examples demonstrate the use of meaningful activities to engage children, build trusting relationships and developing skills.

### **Example of effectiveness:** Project workers, Swansea

In Swansea, YJS OoCD project workers demonstrated a highly effective, child-centred approach to prevention and diversion.

The role of a YJS project worker was to engage in preventative basis with children but to also motivate them to engage in projects and activities in the community.

Following an initial assessment, a plan of work was devised with the child, their family and other professionals. The plan typically involved goal setting for the child to work on over a set period, ensuring that interventions were needs-led and personally meaningful.

Intervention work with children to reduce offending included workshops which focused on:

- anti-social behaviour

- knife crime
- youth violence
- child criminal and sexual exploitation
- substance misuse
- fire setting
- motor vehicle crime.

These were delivered in a variety of ways, including one-to-one work, group activities, and programmes at the local youth justice centre.

A creative and therapeutic programme was also available. This included:

- **Surf therapy** (previously funded by South Wales Police), which combined physical activity with emotional resilience-building.
- **Hair therapy** offered salon-based taster sessions, with one young person progressing to a college course through Turnaround funding.
- **A weekly girls' group** providing a safe space to explore identity and relationships, with one participant now volunteering with Swansea YJS.
- Children worked towards a recognised **Agored Cymru Youth Achievement Award**, which helped them build skills step by step in a structured way.
- **A music group** used creative expression to explore themes of masculinity, violence, and street culture.

This reflected a holistic and responsive model of youth justice intervention, with a focus on long-term positive outcomes.

In Seb's case below, the project worker not only supported him in addressing his offending behaviour but also built a trusted relationship that motivated him to engage in wider positive activities and access additional support services.

### Case illustration

Seb, a 16-year-old with no prior offences, received an OoCD for damaging a car wing mirror. Though the offence was minor, police intelligence highlighted wider concerns, including gang associations, periods of going missing, and displays of violent behaviour.

Given Seb's willingness to engage, the 'Bureau'<sup>5</sup> deemed a community resolution appropriate.

#### Inspectors found:

- *Medium risk of serious harm and safety concerns were appropriately identified through assessment.*
- *Strong multi-agency information gathering informed robust planning focused on desistance.*
- *Engagement with the Turnaround programme provided access to positive activities and built a trusting relationship with the project worker.*

<sup>5</sup> In Wales the process of dealing with OoCD is called a 'Bureau'.

- *The project worker's enthusiasm encouraged Seb's participation in both group and one-to-one sessions.*
- *Activities addressed peer influence and offending behaviour; experiences like a zipline challenge supported emotional expression and engagement.*
- *The intervention was well-sequenced, with practical support (e.g. travel assistance) ensuring consistent attendance.*
- *Seb's mother was actively involved, reinforcing progress at home.*

**Outcome:** Through participation in positive activities, the project worker delivered targeted interventions addressing the child's gang associations, conflict management, and the risks of carrying weapons. This consistent engagement fostered trust and led to increased motivation from Seb to engage with wider support services, including SaLTs and education, training, and employment (ETE) pathways.

## **Example of effectiveness:** Remedi mentors and restorative services, Wigan

Funded through the YEF, REMEDI delivered a trauma-informed, restorative mentoring programme across Greater Manchester. Working in close partnership with STEER via [PPIED](#) and Turnaround programmes, REMEDI offered an intensive 12-week mentoring, restorative family work, and restorative justice interventions to children who were committing violent offences or displaying violent behaviours at OoCD level and below.

### **Key features included:**

- **Integrated support:** REMEDI complemented existing services (e.g. CSC involvement), ensuring children already engaged with other agencies could still access additional, tailored support.
- **Victim-informed approach:** restorative justice was embedded, with a focus on repairing harm and building accountability through direct or indirect victim engagement.
- **Data-driven evaluation:** Effectiveness was measured not only by reoffending rates but also by broader indicators such as police contact, missing episodes, and victimisation.
- **Scalable delivery:** Over three years, REMEDI received 294 referrals, with 166 contactable children. There were 10 mentors across Greater Manchester, with one mentor per borough. In Wigan, future delivery would be maintained by a single case manager, supported by the wider team.

The programme was being evaluated by the University of Birmingham, with a full report due in October 2025. Early findings showed a 15 per cent reoffending rate within 12 months post-closure. Figure 3 details outputs achieved from the service between April 2023 and March 2025.

# REM

## RESTORATIVE MENTORING

**550**

Children and Young people accessed our intensive restorative mentoring service

**100%**

Were **satisfied** with the support received and found mentoring a **positive experience**

**93%**

Expressed they felt more **CONFIDENT**

**92%**

Expressed **increased SELF ESTEEM**

**94%**

Expressed they felt more in **CONTROL**

**97%**

Expressed they felt more **POSITIVE**

**93%**

93% expressed that they **learned NEW SKILLS**

**98%**

Expressed they felt **BETTER INFORMED**

**96%**

Expressed improved **RELATIONSHIPS** with **FAMILY** and **FRIENDS**



Provided by

**remedi**



Figure 3: Mentoring outcomes April 2022 to March 2025

REMEDI's work demonstrated strong partnership collaboration, particularly with Wigan Athletic and other local services, enhancing the reach and relevance of its interventions. The programme adopted a broad and meaningful approach to measuring success, using indicators such as no further action (NFA) outcomes and missing from home (MFH) episodes alongside traditional reoffending data. Its delivery model was both responsive and flexible, allowing it to adapt effectively to local needs and changes in funding, ensuring continuity and consistency in support for children across Greater Manchester.



[You can learn more about Remedi through its website](#), where you can access a clear overview of what restorative justice is and how it works and how it is delivered by Remedi.



The YEF published a [pilot evaluation of Remedi restorative mentors](#) in January 2024. The evaluation aimed to refine the programme's theory of change and understand its impact on children, families, and victims.

## Example of effectiveness: Youth engagement workers, Tameside

Funded through the Turnaround programme, youth engagement workers had become central to Tameside's youth justice approach, working across OoCDs, prevention, and statutory orders.

### Practice highlighted:

- **Relational practice:** The youth engagement workers built trusted relationships with children, supporting them to explore identity, challenge toxic masculinity, and develop pro-social connections. Their work was trauma-informed and child-centred, often acting as a bridge between children and wider services.
- **Integrated support:** Their practice was enhanced through close collaboration with SaLTs and CAMHS and YJS, ensuring emotional wellbeing was addressed holistically across all levels of intervention.
- **Community connections:** They had forged strong links with local organisations, enabling children to access a wide range of positive activities such as football clubs, charity hikes, rock climbing, and creative projects. These partnerships improved exit planning and sustained support beyond formal YJS involvement.
- **Innovative projects:** One standout initiative was the Bike Project. Children built bikes from donated parts over six weeks, fostering teamwork, skill-building, and long-term engagement. Participation continued beyond their YJS involvement, supporting reintegration and resilience.
- **Changing perceptions:** By connecting children with community-based activities and local sports teams, the youth engagement workers were helping to shift public perceptions, highlighting children's strengths and potential rather than their offending behaviour.

Local partners noted improved coordination and joined up working since the roles were introduced. Children reported feeling more supported and connected, and community providers have become more engaged in supporting youth justice outcomes.

YJS staff commented:

*“Emily and Jack [youth engagement workers] are supporting children to develop pro-social identity. Finding opportunities for children in what they love to build beautiful relationships with children, to let them see there are good adults out there and other opportunities in their communities.”*

*“The work with youth [engagement] workers and community builds upon the child’s mental health and emotional wellbeing, building upon pro-social identity and support to preventing social isolation for children.”*

## Diversity aware interventions

OoCDs play a crucial role in the youth justice system by addressing offending behaviour without the lasting consequences of formal criminalisation. For OoCDs to be fair and effective, they must be responsive to the diverse needs of children.

Research shows that children from Black and minority backgrounds often face systemic barriers to diversion, including limited access to culturally appropriate support and mistrust of services (Bateman et al., 2022; Centre for Justice Innovation, 2021). Other aspects of diversity also shape children’s justice experiences. Girls may enter the system through pathways linked to trauma or exploitation, yet many interventions are still based on male-centric models. Neurodiverse children, those with autism, ADHD, or learning difficulties, are also over-represented and often underserved, with standard OoCDs failing to meet their communication and behavioural needs (User Voice, 2025).

Inclusive, culturally competent, and trauma-informed interventions are more likely to build trust, encourage engagement, and support lasting change. To ensure equity, services must embed diversity considerations at every stage, from assessment to delivery, so that all children, regardless of background or need, are given a fair chance to move forward.

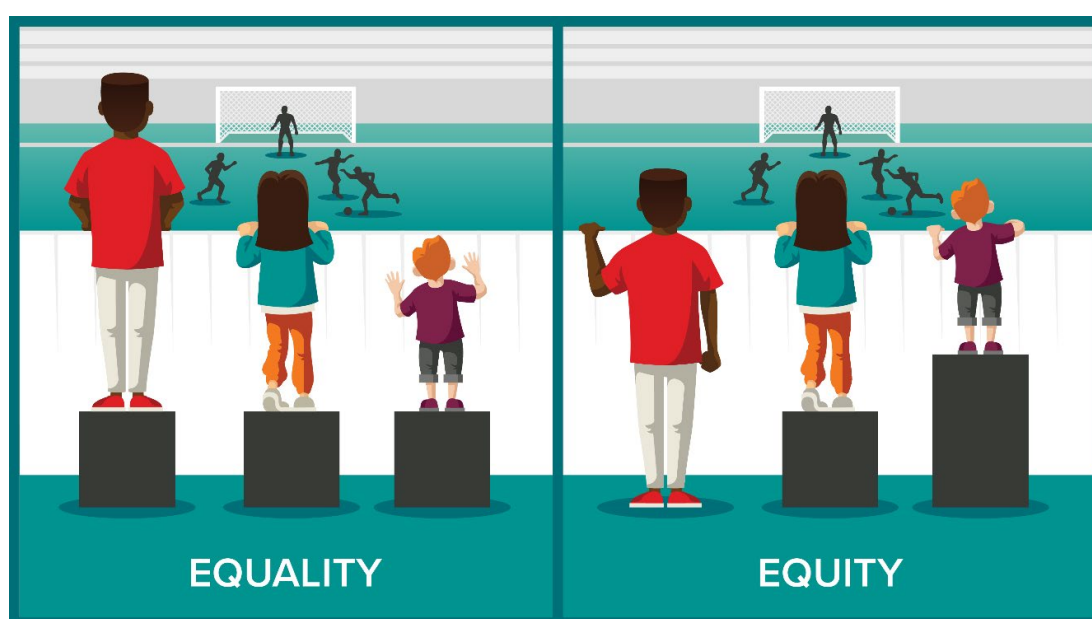


Figure 4: Equality vs Equity illustration<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Equality vs Equity: Image illustrating the difference between equality and equity in terms of providing resources based on individual needs to achieve equal outcomes.

The following examples highlight effective practice observed during our thematic inspection, where services adapted OoCDs to better meet the diverse needs of children.

## Black and minority ethnic children

### Example of effectiveness: Lived experience mentors, Walsall

In 2024, Walsall YJS commissioned St Giles to deliver mentoring support for children at risk of further offending. Using community safety funding, the YJS also commissioned a dedicated mentor to work specifically with children from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds.



St Giles supported 13 children, with a mentor who drew on lived experience to build trust and engage those who may have not responded to traditional approaches. Of these, 11 children have not reoffended, and three successfully completed their interventions. The mentoring was embedded into each child's exit plan, ensuring continuity of support beyond formal supervision.

Ricky Otto, a mentor with lived experience of prison and a former professional footballer, worked with eight children in 2024. His work focused on helping Black boys explore identity, culture, masculinity, and experiences of discrimination. Five of the children he supported have not reoffended. Ricky's approach, informed by his own journey and professional insight, provided a powerful example of culturally responsive, identity-affirming practice.

This dual approach mentoring model demonstrated how lived experience, cultural relevance, and persistent engagement can support desistance and improve outcomes for children in the youth justice system.



During the [joint thematic inspection of work with children subject to remand in youth detention](#), we spoke to Ricky Otto, Black boys resettlement mentor at Walsall YJS, and Phil Rutherford, strategic lead for Walsall YJS. They discussed the benefits of the approach they have taken in developing Ricky's mentoring role to work with Black boys in custody. You can access the interview here: [Effective Practice: Interview with Ricky Otto and Phil Rutherford Walsall YJS](#)

# Children from low socio-economic backgrounds

## Example of effectiveness: Open Lens Media, Walsall

Open Lens Media is a development, engagement, and employability social enterprise based in the West Midlands. They utilise creative approaches in media and digital technology to provide employability, educational, engagement, training, and community consultation services to young people and youth-focused agencies.

They specialise in working directly with children, young people, and young adults between the ages of 11-35 from disenfranchised and low socio-economic backgrounds.

During our inspection we heard that Open Lens Media delivered two targeted programmes for children who were not in education, employment, or training (NEET).

1. Open Lens was commissioned by the Triangle Trust 1949 fund to deliver their one-to-one pathway programme, specifically designed to support Black, Asian and mixed heritage boys, aged 16+ across the West Midlands to build their professional and personal skills and abilities. This funding allowed them to deliver their [pathways programme](#) to groups of up to 20 boys per year within the YJS.
2. They also ran a dedicated six-week programme for six young people involved with the YJS. Open Lens worked with the YJS to understand the children and sessions were tailored to individual needs.

Both programmes offered a comprehensive package of support, including one-to-one personal development coaching, goal setting, achievement mapping, and career planning. Participants also received training in IT and digital skills, interview techniques, presentation skills, and CV writing. Additional support included application reviews and wellbeing support aimed at reducing employment-related anxiety and stress.

Evaluation data from their end of year report for the Triangle Trust project reported the following findings:

- The programme had a positive influence on participants with 50 per cent of them reporting that they have made more positive choices in friendship and peer circles since being the programme.
- 100 per cent of participants said they engaged in positive activity during or after finishing the programme.

This was an effective example of a holistic approach, empowering young people with the confidence and skills needed to progress into positive futures.



The [Open Lens Media](#) website shares their aims, values and mission in more detail.



Follow this link to access the [Open Lens 2024 Annual Outcomes Report](#)

*"My favourite session was the mock interview one because I've never done one before and I've got poor speech for communicating and bad social skills, so it really helped me."*

**Jayden**

*"I've enjoyed the course, and it has taught me everything I need to know. It has helped me build skills and I'm grateful for it."*

**Kevin**

# Girls

## Example of effectiveness: REACH safeguarding adolescence service, Wigan

In response to a growing disproportionality in the number of girls involved in youth justice and safeguarding services, Wigan's REACH Safeguarding Adolescence Service, including the YJS, developed a trauma-informed, targeted group work programme. Co-designed with children through consultation and questionnaires, the programme supported girls across various stages of youth justice involvement, including prevention, Turnaround, OoCD assessments and custodial cases. Its core aim is to enhance emotional wellbeing, foster positive relationships, and empower girls to better understand and manage their behaviours.

Funded by the Greater Manchester Violence Reduction Unit until December 2025, with potential ongoing support from the Community Safety Partnership, the 12-week programme featured structured sessions on mental health, substance misuse, domestic abuse, sexual health, careers, and internet safety. Many sessions led to AQA awards, recognising individual learning and achievement. A holistic approach was taken, incorporating creative and wellbeing-focused activities such as crafts, pamper nights, and seasonal celebrations to promote emotional safety and belonging.

Delivered collaboratively by REACH staff, local council services, and specialist partners like StreetDoctors<sup>7</sup> and Locala<sup>8</sup>, the programme engaged 14 girls. Outcomes included the completion of 10 AQA awards<sup>9</sup>, development of CVs, increased confidence, new friendships, and tailored support for individual needs, such as exam accommodations and access to contraception. The group also provided a safe, respectful space where girls felt heard and supported. While the location posed access challenges for some, the programme's structure and targeted approach contributed significantly to its success.

The quotes below were taken from participants as part of the feedback and evaluation process:

*"A place where we were treated with respect and could talk about anything."*

*"I made new friends and had fun."*

*"Made me think about my own life."*

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<sup>7</sup> StreetDoctors is a UK-based charity that trains young people (aged 11–25) in emergency first aid, particularly in areas affected by youth violence, working in partnership with youth offending teams, schools, and community groups across Greater Manchester. Sessions are delivered by volunteer healthcare professionals (<https://streetdoctors.org>).

<sup>8</sup> Locala Health & Wellbeing collaborates with YJSs in Greater Manchester to support 10–18-year-olds in the CJS through confidential health assessments, education, referrals, advocacy, court input, and public health promotion, aiming to improve wellbeing and reduce reoffending ([locala.org.uk/about-us/what-we-do/](https://locala.org.uk/about-us/what-we-do/))

<sup>9</sup> AQA unit awards are short, flexible learning units offered through the AQA Unit Award Scheme (UAS), which recognises individual achievements in a wide range of subjects and skills. Each completed unit results in a certificate, helping learners build confidence and track progress in a personalised, accessible way [AQA | About Us](#)

# Neurodiverse children

## Example of effectiveness: InPower, Walsall

InPower partnered with the YJS in Walsall to deliver a unique and impactful intervention for children subject to out-of-court disposals. Based in local communities, InPower Academy used mixed martial arts (MMA) as its primary tool to engage and inspire young people. MMA is a sport that resonated deeply with children, offering benefits such as improved confidence, enhanced focus and concentration, stress relief, and the ability to maintain a positive mindset.

The InPower Academy's mission is: *"Empowering communities through martial arts by instilling self-confidence, resilience, and creating pathways to positive life transformations".*



During our inspection, InPower was working with a total of 96 children engaged with the programme due to high levels of re-engagement and consistent attendance. The sessions were designed to be fun, friendly, and non-intimidating, creating a safe space where young people felt motivated and supported.

The programme blended physical training with structured conversations around mindset, resilience, and life choices. Coaches, many of whom had lived experience, built trust and used the discipline of MMA to promote focus, confidence, and emotional regulation. Discussions around drill music, peer pressure, or conflict were naturally integrated into sessions, allowing young people to reflect and grow in a non-judgemental environment.

This approach was particularly effective for children who struggled with traditional interventions, by offering a strengths-based, trauma-informed alternative. Sessions took place on a weekly basis supporting children to participate in regular physical activity to develop self-confidence, develop discipline and manage behaviours.

In the case below, we heard how Karin had been referred to InPower to get support with anger management and emotional regulation.

### Case illustration

Karin, a 15-year-old female with an early help care plan (EHCP) for behavioural and learning needs, received her first OoCD for a violent offence. Though she had minimal prior police contact, concerns included peer influence, school fights, and emotional volatility at home.

**Inspectors found:**

- *The PDAT appropriately identified group dynamics and impulsivity as key risk factors for future harm.*
- *Emotional impact on the family, including self-harm and aggression, was well analysed.*
- *Planning addressed Karin's learning needs, favouring practical, community-based sessions.*
- *Strengths-based approach included referral to Turnaround and weekly MMA InPower sessions to help Karin regulate emotions and channel frustration.*
- *The OoCD intervention period was extended to support emotional wellbeing and onward referrals.*

**Outcome:** Karin fully engaged with MMA sessions, continuing beyond the OoCD period. Exit planning, co-developed with Karin and her mother, ensured ongoing access to MMA, Turnaround support, and referral to the Health and Crime Prevention Team. MMA proved a valuable physical outlet, boosting Karin's confidence, self-esteem, and emotional regulation.

## **Example of effectiveness:** Media Academy Cymru (MAC), Swansea

The MAC project was a creative intervention designed for children and young people on out-of-court disposals. It used music as a tool to explore themes of masculinity, identity, and emotional expression in a safe and supportive environment. Through songwriting, music production, and group discussion, participants were encouraged to reflect on their behaviours, challenge harmful gender norms, and develop healthier coping strategies. The project aimed to reduce reoffending by fostering self-awareness, building confidence, and promoting positive peer relationships.

DIVERT was closely linked to MAC as part of its broader mission to support young people at risk of entering the CJS. It complemented other MAC initiatives like the positive masculinity project and Cerridwen (Youth Violence Programme), offering a range of tailored interventions for young people. The DIVERT programme was an early intervention delivered by Media Academy Cymru and supported those on OoCD by offering tailored interventions that addressed the root causes of offending behaviour. The programme typically included one-to-one support, restorative approaches, and access to positive activities that promoted personal development, emotional resilience, and community engagement. DIVERT focused on building trust, encouraging accountability, and connecting young people with education, training, and employment opportunities.



[You can access the MAC website here.](#)



You can learn more about the diversionary activities that MAC provided to children and young people in Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan via their website

[Divert – Media Academy Cymru](#). You can access some short and informative videos in both English and Welsh which explain the decision-making process and can be shared with young people.

### Case illustration

Gareth, a 15-year-old male, with ADHD and oppositional defiant disorder, received an OoCD for a public order offence involving verbal abuse toward police during a group incident. Though he had no prior OoCDs or convictions, police intelligence indicated concerns around violence and threatening behaviour. He was assessed as medium risk of serious harm and safety and wellbeing.

#### Inspectors found:

- *A wide range of sources informed the assessment, including Gareth, his parent, school, CAMHS, a SaLT, CSC, and police.*
- *The assessment explored Gareth's experiences of domestic abuse and the absence of positive male role models.*
- *The intervention plan was tailored to Gareth's needs and learning style, with a strong focus on building strengths and addressing offence-related behaviour.*
- *A key feature of the plan was referral to the positive programme, which provided structured sessions on healthy masculinity, peer influence, and emotional regulation.*
- *Gareth engaged in positive activities with the diversion officer, using the MAC framework to challenge harmful behaviours and beliefs.*
- *Strong relationships were built with Gareth and his mother, supported by consistent multi-agency communication.*

**Outcome:** The MAC programme played a central role in Gareth's progress, offering a safe space to explore identity, challenge toxic masculinity, and develop healthier coping strategies. His engagement with the programme, alongside support from the diversion worker, led to increased motivation and participation in positive activities, helping to reduce risk and support long-term desistance.

## Working with victims

The [Code of Practice for Victims of Crime](#) sets out minimum standards of support for victims, which police and YJSs are legally required to uphold. National guidance from the [NPCC](#) and [YJB](#) promotes a joint approach to ensure victims are heard and their needs considered. While not all victims engage, practitioners should explain the process, gather views, and involve them in decision-making. Timely sharing of victim details by police enables contact and exploration of restorative justice options.

Victims' views must be recorded and shared with decision-makers, with clear communication, even when outcomes differ from their preferences. Restorative justice offers a meaningful way for victims to express impact, ask questions, and contribute to repairing harm, enhancing satisfaction and supporting accountability.

The following examples below highlight effective practice in prioritising the victim's voice, using restorative approaches, and tailoring interventions to address harmful behaviours, demonstrating how victim engagement can be embedded meaningfully within OoCD delivery.

### **Example of effectiveness:** Victim engagement and restorative justice Dorset

In DCYJS, a structured and victim-centred approach to restorative justice was embedded within the delivery of OoCDs. The officer in charge (OiC) played a key role in initiating victim engagement, routinely seeking consent to share views with DCYJS and discussing potential disposals and restorative options following a child's contact with the police. This reduced delays in the restorative justice process. Victim consent was the norm and where this was not given, the DCYJS restorative justice practitioners could link with the OiC to explore further engagement.

Initial contact with victims was made via letter, followed by a telephone call from a restorative justice practitioner. Victim views were expected to be included in the initial referral and were considered in joint decision-making panels (JDMP). Restorative justice workers relied on police to flag any safety concerns early, and where risks were identified, direct contact was made with the victim to ensure appropriate safeguarding. The victim worker would obtain further information from the victims to assist with the prevention and diversion assessment tool.

A key strength of the DCYJS model was the 'repairing harm meeting', held in every case. This brought together the case manager (who gave the child's views), the reparation coordinator; and the restorative justice practitioner (who gave the victim's views), to co-design meaningful interventions linked to the harm caused by the offence. Activities were risk-assessed and tailored; for example, knife-related offences may involve hospital-based sessions. Where direct reparation was not requested, community impact work was undertaken, such as fundraising for emergency services charities.

Restorative justice practitioners in DCYJS were highly trained, particularly in managing complex cases such as domestic abuse or harmful sexual behaviour. They co-worked these cases and attended risk panels to represent the victim's perspective. The service also used tools like the AIM3<sup>10</sup> manual to support restorative work with victims. Despite the short-term nature of OoCDs, DCYJS had increased the number of restorative justice conferences to a target of at least one per month.

A recent example involved a child excluded from school for carrying a knife, where a conference between the child and headteacher helped both parties understand each other's perspectives.

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<sup>10</sup> The AIM3 assessment tool is a structured professional judgment framework used in youth justice to assess young people aged 12–18 who display harmful sexual behaviour (HSB). Developed by Leonard and Hackett through the AIM Project, it is widely used across the UK to support decision-making, intervention planning, and risk management ([The AIM project](#)).

The headteacher said that: *“On reflection I must share that it was a profound moment, and the impact of the meeting is still something I am digesting a couple of weeks on, but in a wholly positive way.*

*“The opportunity to hear from the child, understand his context and to discuss the incident in a frank and open manner was powerful. To then share the school’s response and how we feel, was something I felt important to do and I am very grateful to have been given the forum to do so.*

*“I cannot think of any way the process itself could be developed further but wanted to thank you and your team for facilitating it. It was a bit of a 'landmark moment' for me in my career as a head of school in terms of really developing a relational and inclusive leadership approach.”*

The service recognised areas for improvement, particularly in data collection and evaluation. While annual restorative audits were conducted, systematic recording of outcomes and victim feedback were underdeveloped. Plans were in place to make more use of ‘spontaneous feedback’ mechanisms and improve how restorative justice was explained to victims, recognising the harm that victims may have experienced.

This joined-up, trauma-informed approach, supported by trained restorative justice staff, consistent police engagement, and a commitment to meaningful reparation, demonstrated how victims’ needs can be effectively integrated into OoCD delivery. Victims and children reported the meaningful and powerful impact face-to-face conferences had.

A child who made a wooden planter for his mother, the victim of his offence, said: *“He [the child] was extremely proud of the planter he made, and I was very touched by it. It’s beautiful and means a great deal to me. I haven’t ever seen him make something with so much care and attention. It felt like a sincere and thoughtful step toward repairing things between us, knowing he put time and care into making something for me. It also made me feel valued as a mum.”*

## **Example of effectiveness:** The group with no name (GWiNN), Wigan

The development of the victim support group GWiNN emerged in response to a growing number of children involved in OoCDs and who were also victims of crime.

Initial consultations with four young people helped practitioners understand their experiences, thoughts, and needs, prompting a creative, flexible approach to support. Using the Lundy Model<sup>11</sup> to engage the children they expressed a clear desire for a safe space where they could talk openly, especially as some had become socially withdrawn due to their experiences. Figure 5 below highlights the approach used in Wigan:

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<sup>11</sup> The Lundy Model of Child Participation (2007) provides a practical framework for implementing Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which upholds children’s right to be heard in matters affecting them. It outlines four key elements – space, voice, audience, and influence – to ensure children are meaningfully involved in decision-making. Widely used across education, youth justice, and policy, the model promotes genuine, impactful participation – [The Lundy Model | EU Children's Participation Platform](#).



**Figure 5: Adapted from the Lundy Model of child participation**

Through restorative approaches and informal engagement, the group was shaped by the children themselves. Children designed the logo for the group, which can be seen to the right. The group provided a supportive environment to rebuild confidence, foster friendships, and gradually re-engage with the community. The group included eight regular members who participated in activities and meetings, helping them find their voice and influence within the community.



Facilitated by restorative justice practitioners, the group was supported through practical means such as transport and a WhatsApp group. Activities included bowling, crafts, and shared meals, helping to build relationships in a relaxed, relational setting.

The group also worked collaboratively with other services, including early help, and offered bespoke support such as one-to-one sessions during meetings. Tools like emotion cards were used to aid communication, and children were welcome to attend for as long as they wished, ensuring a flexible and supportive environment.



The group were invited by the Restorative Justice Council to share their experiences at a continuous professional development (CPD) event, where participating children received an AQA certificate.

Group feedback was positive, with the aims of the group being realised through positive engagement, communication and social interaction.



[You can access examples of the GWiNN emotions card following this link.](#)

In the case below, Lacey accessed GWiNN after becoming a victim of an assault at school where footage was later shared.

### Case illustration

Lacey, a 14-year-old girl, was assaulted by a peer at school. The incident was filmed and widely circulated on social media, leading to significant distress and re-traumatisation.

Her father reported ongoing bullying, including verbal taunts at school, and expressed a desire for the most serious outcome for the perpetrator.

Restorative justice practitioners engaged with Lacey and her family, gathering an impact statement that was presented at the JDMP. This statement informed the rationale behind the disposal decision and contributed to a broader support plan.

Following this, Lacey was offered the opportunity to join GWiNN. With consent, she began attending sessions, which provided a safe, relational space to rebuild confidence and process her experience. Group activities helped foster trust and connection.

Her participation in GWiNN remained voluntary and ongoing, with the flexibility to attend for as long as she needed.

## Example of effectiveness: Prioritising the victim voice at the JDMP

### Case illustration

Emily, a 15-year-old girl with a long history of CSC involvement, had experienced multiple adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). She received a six-week triage intervention following a theft offence involving two bottles of wine.

#### Inspectors found:

- *Victim's views were explored before the JDMP, including frustration over Emily's repeated behaviour.*
- *Victim contact was thorough and positive, building trust and clear communication.*
- *The YJS discussed risk, outcomes, and preferences with the victim.*
- *The victim requested a letter of apology and a banning order from the store.*
- *They also asked to be kept informed throughout the process, including post-panel.*
- *Victim input was reflected in the pre-panel assessment and shared with decision-makers.*

**Outcome:** The JDMP endorsed the case manager's pre-panel proposal. The case demonstrated strong victim engagement, with the victim expressing satisfaction with the YJS's response and approach.

## Example of effectiveness: Responding to victim's concerns

### Case illustration

Mark, an 11-year-old boy, received an OoCD for burglary. He and a co-accused, also the victim's grandson, entered a property through a window, ate biscuits, and moved items around. The victims had experienced repeated incidents of victimisation.

#### Inspectors found:

- *The victim provided a personal statement, requesting it be shared with both boys to deliver a strong message.*
- *They wanted the boys to experience a "shock" and asked to be updated post-JDMP.*
- *The YJS shared the statement as requested and provided an outcome update.*
- *Risk assessment acknowledged the harm but, considering the unusual circumstances and police intelligence, classified the case as low risk of serious harm (ROSH).*
- *The intervention plan included four sessions: victim awareness, consequences, burglary and the law, and peer influence, reflecting the victim's concerns.*
- *A non-contact condition was imposed due to repeated victimisation. When breached, a prompt meeting was held, showing responsiveness to the victim's safety and wishes.*

**Outcome:** Two sessions were delivered, focusing on victim awareness and consequences. A letter of apology was completed. The case reflected a balanced approach, prioritising accountability and victim engagement.

## Delivering effective case supervision with children

Effective case supervision with children on OoCDs within YJSs is essential to ensure that interventions are proportionate, appropriate, and tailored to the individual needs of the child. It supports consistent and fair decision-making, helping to avoid unnecessary escalation into the formal justice system. Case supervision also promotes child-centred practice by ensuring the child's voice and experiences are central to planning and delivery.

The NPCC's 2018 report on OoCDs found that restorative justice, mentoring, and early intervention, when delivered through coordinated supervision, can reduce harm and sustain victim satisfaction. It also stressed the role of case managers in coordinating services and ensuring accountability. Effective case supervision ensures that interventions are responsive to changes in risk or circumstances.

During our inspection we found that YJS practitioners were skilled in engaging with children and motivating them to complete their interventions.

## Prevention and diversion assessment tool (PDAT)

The PDAT was introduced by the YJB and became mandatory for use in all formal and informal OoCDs from April 2024. It was developed in consultation with frontline case managers, academics, and HM Inspectorate of Probation to align with the Child First approach<sup>12</sup> and to provide a consistent, holistic framework for assessing children's needs, strengths, and circumstances.

The PDAT was a critical component in the effective delivery of OoCDs within YJSs. It provided a structured and consistent framework for assessing a young person's needs, risks, and protective factors, ensuring that decisions are proportionate, evidence-based, and tailored to the individual. By facilitating early identification of vulnerabilities, such as mental health concerns, learning needs, or family issues and risk concerns, PDAT enabled timely and targeted interventions. It also promoted multi-agency collaboration by incorporating insights from professionals across services, supporting a holistic understanding of the child's circumstances. Furthermore, PDAT enhanced transparency and accountability by clearly documenting the rationale behind decisions, essential for quality assurance and effective

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<sup>12</sup> The Child First approach in youth justice prioritises children's rights, needs, and potential over their offending behaviour. It promotes strengths-based, trauma-informed, and developmentally appropriate support, focusing on positive outcomes, diversion, and collaborative relationships to encourage long-term desistance ([What is Child First?](#)).

case management. Overall, it ensured that OoCDs were not only a diversion from formal justice processes but also a meaningful opportunity for support and change.



You can learn more about the PDAT and access guidance on the youth justice resource hub website: [YJB's prevention and diversion assessment tool \(PDAT\)](#)



[Prevention and diversion assessment tool Q&A webinar](#) is a helpful session delivered by the YJB, introducing the PDAT and answering questions from practitioners.

## **Example of effectiveness:** Assessment of diversity and learning needs to support an OoCD

### **Case illustration**

Simon, aged 15, received an OoCD for burglary and criminal damage. Although this was his first OoCD, there were signs of challenging behaviour at home and school. He lived with his mother, who was separated from his father, and had a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder (ASD). The YJS case manager described him as *“likeable, imaginative, and a great storyteller”*.

#### **Inspectors found:**

- *The child gravity matrix was applied flexibly, reducing the score from five to four due to mitigating factors like neurodiversity and welfare needs.*
- *A full PDAT assessment, incorporating Simon's voice and learning needs, informed the OoCD decision. It was supported by assessments from the Turnaround and crime prevention workers.*
- *The case manager who completed the PDAT also attended the JDMP.*
- *The assessment highlighted his mother's poor physical health and her role as a protective factor, noting Simon's occasional caregiving role.*
- *Parental separation and emotional health concerns were explored, with CAMHS consulted for support.*
- *Patterns of aggression and damage in home and school settings were identified.*
- *Issues around peer loyalty and a need to please others were also noted.*

**Outcome:** An OoCD was issued with interventions targeting thinking and behaviour, decision-making, and legal understanding – appropriate given Simon's circumstances and assessed needs.

## **Example of effectiveness:** Creative use of interventions included in planning and delivery of an OoCD

### **Case illustration**

Lee, aged 15, received an OoCD for a violent offence against a female, committed with a co-defendant. At the start of the OoCD, he moved from local authority care to live with his grandparents.

**Inspectors found:**

- *The PDAT showed strong planning to support Lee's completion of the OoCD.*
- *Planning involved Lee, his school, and his grandmother.*
- *The assessment addressed his needs, strengths, and protective factors.*
- *The intervention plan focused on safety and understanding the impact of violence.*
- *The case manager creatively used a video of a BMX rider, aligned with Lee's interests, to illustrate the consequences of violence.*

**Outcome:** Lee made good progress. After moving in with his grandparents, he avoided further police contact, remained in mainstream education, and took part in activities like rugby and biking. He maintained regular contact with siblings through the local authority care team. The OoCD was ended early after successful completion of all interventions.

# Partnership working



Effective delivery of OoCDs relies on strong, collaborative partnerships across criminal justice, health, social care, and community services. By working together, agencies can ensure that interventions are proportionate, timely, and tailored to the individual's needs, maximising opportunities for rehabilitation while addressing the root causes of offending. Clear communication, shared goals, and coordinated planning are essential to achieving sustainable outcomes and reducing reoffending. Strong and aligned partnership work supports effective exit planning and ongoing support for children with help being provided by the right agencies and services.

## Example of effectiveness: A youth justice-led, multi-agency approach

### Case illustration

Sophia, a 16-year-old female, received an OoCD following multiple violent incidents at home, with her mother and siblings as victims. Though this was her first formal offence, it followed a pattern of escalating behaviour.

#### Inspectors found:

- *A safety plan was co-developed with her mother and recorded in the PDAT.*
- *CAMHS and a SaLT supported Sophia's emotional and communication needs; the SaLT assessment ruled out ADHD and helped reshape her self-identity.*
- *YJSs delivered a tailored support package, including emotional wellbeing sessions, a girls' group, and creative interventions like anger management through boxing.*
- *CSC involvement was well-managed, with strong follow-through.*
- *Regular school communication supported understanding of Sophia's needs.*
- *Family support services addressed broader household dynamics.*
- *The case reflected strong, trauma-informed, child-centred partnership working.*

**Outcome:** Violent episodes reduced during the intervention. Sophia engaged well, gained confidence through group work, accessed emotional support, and built trusting relationships with professionals, helping her feel heard and valued.

## Example of effectiveness: Addressing vulnerability through partnership

### Case illustration

Matthew, a 15-year-old male, received an OoCD for a public order offence, whereby he was verbally abusive to the staff at a local centre, using homophobic language. The YJS were aware of three previous incidents from police intelligence for vandalism, verbal threats, and conflict with an ex-partner.

At the time of the JDMP, the child was open to CAMHS due to self-harm/suicidal ideation and to be assessed for ASD/ADHD.

**Inspectors found:**

- *The child's voice was clearly reflected in the PDAT, informed by a home visit with both the child and mother.*
- *The assessment drew on information from school, CAMHS, SaLTs, CSC records, and police, providing a comprehensive view of the child's needs.*
- *It considered the child's pending ASD/ADHD assessments and confusion around sexuality, as well as the mother's mental health and potential neurodivergence.*
- *The case manager built a strong rapport with the family, supporting engagement throughout.*
- *The YJS ETE worker maintained regular contact with the school, advocating for the child's return and ensuring his vulnerabilities were recognised.*
- *SaLTs and CAMHS were invited to multi-agency discussions, contributing to the child's referral for special educational needs (SEN) support.*
- *Substance misuse services were engaged to provide targeted support.*
- *During the disposal, the child's mental health fluctuated, including periods of self-harm. A coordinated multi-agency response ensured timely support from CAMHS and other services.*

**Outcome:** The advocacy and support for the child around school continued following the closure of the OoCD. A clear exit plan was developed and explained to the family.

**Example of effectiveness:** Supporting a child's motivation to engage through consistent partnership communication

**Case illustration**

Sam, a 17-year-old male college student aspiring to join the military, was arrested for making threats via a WhatsApp group targeting a peer. The police conducted a prompt investigation, liaising with the college and sharing a public protection notification (PPN) with children's social care.

**Inspectors found:**

- *Victim's views were gathered before the OoCD panel and shared with the YJS case manager, including a request for a letter of apology.*
- *Consent was obtained from the child to contact the college, demonstrating transparent communication.*
- *The PDAT provided a holistic overview, incorporating information from police, college, and family.*
- *The child's voice was captured during a home visit with both parents present.*
- *The assessment identified both risks (e.g. emotional regulation, past assaults) and strengths (e.g. military college, youth club, family support).*

- *The intervention plan was co-produced with the child and parent, reflecting shared understanding and agreement.*
- *The case manager liaised with the college to ensure the victim's safety and monitor the child's progress.*
- *The plan addressed emotional regulation and accountability through: 'One Punch' intervention, toxic masculinity programme, anger management and coping strategies, CV writing and employment support.*

**Outcome:** The OoCD panel made an informed decision based on multi-agency input and victim feedback. As a result of this offence, a wider contextual safeguarding piece of work was undertaken by the child missing and exploitation team (CMET) with the military college around educating students about relationships and online use.

There was evidence of a review taking place with a manager and YJS police officer after six weeks, and regular contact with Sam and his mother throughout the intervention. The exit plan was in place with continued support with college and through the positive masculinity programme.

## Exit planning



Effective exit planning involves engaging children, families and, where relevant, victims in the process. Diversion and OoCD interventions are usually short term, with many children presenting with complex needs. Exit planning can provide longer term support from services within the community (YJB, 2024).

Exit planning is crucial for OoCD for several reasons:

- **Ensuring continuity of support:** Focuses on maintaining support post-OoCD intervention to help children integrate into their communities.
- **Engaging families and communities:** Involves families and communities to create a supportive environment, addressing how the child, parent/carers can sustain progress made following the end of an intervention.
- **Supporting positive outcomes:** Promotes positive life choices and outcomes through tailored support and interventions, such as improved education and employment prospects.
- **Preventing reoffending:** Addresses underlying causes of offending behaviour early to reduce reoffending. Starting exit planning as soon as possible supports access to community intervention, particularly when there are waiting lists for specialist services.
- **Reducing system involvement:** Prevents further involvement in the CJS by addressing issues early.

In the case examples below we saw effective practice from case managers involving the children and preparing them for the ending of the OoCD and planning next steps.

## Example of effectiveness: Including the voice of the child in exit planning

### Case illustration

Jamie, a 13-year-old male, received an OoCD for burglary offences. Jamie was unknown to YJSs prior to this disposal. He engaged with a range of interventions including, sports, music and offending behaviour during the OoCD period.

#### Inspectors found:

- *Clear exit planning was in place and developed together with Jamie and his mother as part of the closure process. Jamie's voice and feedback around his experience of working with YJSs was captured.*
- *CSC completed an assessment, however Jamie's mother felt she did not need any ongoing support.*
- *There was good evidence of joint working by the youth justice service case manager and early help. Jamie was able to access mentoring support which continued to be in place as part of the exit plan.*

**Outcome:** The exit planning in this case was collaborative with Jamie, his parent and wider services to ensure appropriate ongoing support at the end of the OoCD period.

## Example of effectiveness: Exit planning with a focus on wellbeing and continuity of care

### Case illustration

Kate, a 15-year-old female, received an OoCD for a violent offence stemming from a peer conflict on social media. With no prior CJS involvement, the case focused on desistance, safety and wellbeing, considering her neurodivergence and emotional health. Her separated parents were engaged individually throughout the case by the case manager.

#### Inspectors found:

- *Maintained consistent communication with both parents and effective collaboration with the school, connected care, early help, and the exploitation team through home visits and regular professional meetings.*
- *Addressed emotional wellbeing through safety planning and referrals, supported neurodivergent needs with dyslexia and ADHD assessments, and ensured continuity through proactive exit planning.*
- *Exit planning involved key agencies, school, early help, and mental health to ensure continuity of care.*
- *During a crisis and early help workers absence, the case manager coordinated support with Kate, mum, and relevant services.*
- *A structured handover was facilitated with early help, connected care, and emotional wellbeing services at school.*

**Outcome:** Kate completed sessions on online safety, relationship circle, peers and managing difficult situations, which required further input post OoCD to fully consolidate learning. This formed part of the early help exit plan. The YJS stayed involved post OoCD for continuity of care until the early help worker returned to work.



## Reflection questions

### For case managers:

- How do you ensure the child's voice is meaningfully included in assessment and planning?
- In what ways are parents or carers actively involved in shaping the plan and reviewing its delivery?
- How do you ensure continuity of care with key agencies?  
Are there clear handover plans in place, and do they include timelines and responsibilities?

# Key take-aways

## Delivery effective case supervision with children on OoCD:



Successful partnership working depends on a strong, joined-up approach, working across multiple agencies and services including police, health, social care, and community services.



Interventions should be proportionate, appropriate, and tailored to the individual needs and diversity, addressing root causes of offending and responsive to changes in risks of the child.



OoCD should promote child-centred practice by ensuring the child's voice and experiences are central to assessment, planning and delivery.



Coordinate with police and other agencies to ensure a joined-up approach to victim engagement.



Consider how interventions can address the impact of the offence on the victim.



Effective exit planning includes capturing the child's voice, coordinating with relevant services, and preparing all parties for the transition out of youth justice involvement.

# Further reading and resources

## HM Inspectorate of Probation publications

### Academic Insights:

Access the *Academic Insights* paper [Evidence-informed model and guide for effective relational working in youth justice](#). Aligned with User Voice findings, it promotes trust-based, youth-centred relationships, emphasising empathy, flexibility, and support. The model also serves as a reflective tool to help practitioners foster meaningful connections that drive positive outcomes.

### Research & Analysis Bulletin:

[The quality of delivery of out-of-court disposals in youth justice](#) (HM Inspectorate of Probation, 2021) highlights wide variation in practice across England and Wales. Stronger outcomes were linked to early YJSs (formerly youth offending teams [YOTs]) involvement, effective multi-agency work, and child-centred approaches. However, many services missed safeguarding concerns, losing key opportunities to support children and prevent escalation.

## Wider research and resources

The Youth Justice Board (YJB) [Case management guidance – Guidance – GOV.UK](#) provides a comprehensive framework for youth justice practitioners and managers, outlining expectations at each stage of a child's journey through the justice system. It includes practical advice on assessment, intervention planning, court work, managing bail and remands, and out-of-court disposals.

[Child First overview and guide \(April 2022\)](#) sets out a clear framework for applying the Child First approach in youth justice. It outlines four core principles: seeing children as children, promoting pro-social identity, collaboration, and avoiding stigma, and shows how these shape assessment, planning, and intervention. The guide offers practical tools, reflective prompts, and links to standards to support child-centred, strengths-based practice.

The [Diversion practice guidance | Youth Endowment Fund](#) provides practical guidance on how to deliver diversion programmes that effectively reduce youth offending. It draws on national evidence and local practice to outline key principles for successful diversion, including early engagement, relationship-based approaches, and multi-agency coordination. The guidance supports practitioners in designing interventions that are trauma-informed, culturally competent, and tailored to individual needs, helping to keep children out of the CJS and improve long-term outcomes.

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