Health and Sport Committee – Health and Social Care in Prison

YouthLink Scotland is the national agency for youth work. Our vision is of a nation which values its young people and their contribution to society, where young people are supported to achieve their potential.

This response focuses on young people in prison, namely in Young Offender Institutions (YOI). The response has been developed with the views and experiences of members working with young people in YOIs and alternatives to secure accommodation. YouthLink Scotland would welcome the opportunity to engage further with the Committee on this issue.

General comments

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (hereafter UNCRC) specifies that every young person has the right to the best possible health (Article 24). This includes young people in YOIs. Critically, these young people also have the right to have a say in all matters affecting them (Article 12). YouthLink Scotland would encourage the Committee to engage directly with young offenders and those with experience of being incarcerated in a YOI.

The RCN report ‘Five Years On’ identified significant health inequalities between the prison population and the general community. This poses a challenge for all involved in youth justice to take measures to reduce this inequality and support young offenders to transition to healthy lifestyles upon leaving prison.

YouthLink Scotland believes that youth work plays an important role in addressing the complex health inequalities of young people in YOIs whilst simultaneously reducing reoffending, supporting positive transitions and future outcomes. Through engaging in youth work, young people are more resilient, optimistic for the future, consider risk, make reasoned decisions and take control.

Youth work has been delivered by different providers in Polmont since 1999. Barnardo’s Scotland has been delivering a youth work service, Outside In, within HMPYOI Polmont and HMPYOI Cornton Vale since 2010 and within HMPYOI Grampian since 2016. Through engaging with youth work in HMPYOI Polmont, 96% of young people made progress in their learning goals and 88% of young people improved their mental health and wellbeing.

A study by The Duke of Edinburgh’s Award (DofE) on the impact of DofE programmes in young offender institutions found that participation in the award “has a positive impact upon the experiences of young people in the secure estate”. It also found that delivery of DofE

---

1 The Royal College of Nursing, Five Years On, p. 6
2 YouthLink Scotland, Youth Work Outcomes
3 Barnardo’s Scotland, Annual Report 2015-16: Barnardo’s Services working with young people in HMYOI Polmont, HMP YOI Cornton Vale & HMPYOI Grampian
4 The Duke of Edinburgh’s Award, The Duke of Edinburgh’s Award: Making a difference with young people in custody – Executive Summary
programmes were most effective where it was not confined to one department but more widely integrated across the whole establishment.\textsuperscript{5}

Beyond YOIs, YouthLink Scotland believes that the broader approach of Community Learning and Development (CLD) would be of benefit to other prisons in Scotland.

\textit{What do you consider are the current pressures on health and social care provision in prisons?}

The recent report by the RCN identified a gap in support for adolescent mental health, in particular a lack of psychiatry and psychotherapy staff.\textsuperscript{6} Further research from the Centre for Youth and Criminal Justice found that young people in custody have experienced higher rates of loss and bereavement that the general population.\textsuperscript{7} In order to cope with the trauma, the young people develop coping strategies including substance use, violence and offending behaviour. Without support to come to terms with the root trauma, the offending behaviours will likely continue when released from YOI.

Research has proven that the adolescent brain is more prone to developing mental health problems with 75\% of mental health conditions onset before the age of 24.\textsuperscript{8} This physiological susceptibility to negative emotions and peer pressure means that it is crucial that young people have spaces that support risk taking.

There appears to be barriers for young offenders accessing a nutritional and varied diet\textsuperscript{9}  \textsuperscript{10} and also spending time outdoors.\textsuperscript{11}  \textsuperscript{12} Both of these aspects are significant barriers to young offenders leading healthy lifestyles.

\textit{To what extent do you believe that health inequalities could be addressed in the prison healthcare system?}

We believe that health inequalities could be addressed more effectively by treating health in a holistic way, addressing the linkages between education, employment, deprivation and health problems. Whilst recognising the need for specialist medical support, we believe that nonmedical interventions can be effective, particularly with regards to mental health support and education focused on general wellbeing. There should also be wider objectives to increase successful transitions back into the community, reduce reoffending and increase positive destinations.

\textsuperscript{5} The Duke of Edinburgh’s Award, \textit{The Duke of Edinburgh’s Award: Making a difference with young people in custody – Executive Summary}
\textsuperscript{6} The Royal College of Nursing, \textit{Five Years On}, p. 15
\textsuperscript{7} Centre for Youth Criminal Justice, \textit{Our Lives with Others: An evaluation of trauma, bereavement and loss developments at HMYOI Polmont}
\textsuperscript{8} Mental Health Foundation, \textit{Poverty and mental health: A review to inform the Joseph Rowntree Foundation’s Anti-Poverty Strategy}, p. 23
\textsuperscript{9} HM Inspectorate of Prisons for Scotland, \textit{Longitudinal Inspection: HMYOI Polmont 19-21 April 2016}, p. 5
\textsuperscript{10} HM Inspectorate of Prisons for Scotland, \textit{HMP & YOI Cornton Vale: Review Inspection 11-13 October 2016}, p. 4
\textsuperscript{11} HM Inspectorate of Prisons for Scotland, \textit{Longitudinal Inspection: HMYOI Polmont 19-21 April 2016}, p. 15
Leading healthy lifestyles requires a combination of good nutrition, exercise, positive mental health support, and education required to make healthy lifestyle choices. Youth work can contribute to all of these areas.

Play and learning outdoors have been proven to have a myriad of positive outcomes for children and young people including lower stress impacts, improved behaviour, enhanced cognitive abilities and reducing ADD/ADHD symptoms. Increased time in prison grounds could be beneficial for the overall health of young offenders. As mentioned above, there is evidence of the positive impact of the Duke of Edinburgh’s Award, which involves an outdoor element, in young offender institutions in England.

It is also clear that physical activity outdoors would improve young offender’s physical health. Scotland-wide figures show that more than 28% of children and 65% adults are overweight and obese, with obesity having a negative correlation with socioeconomic status. This would suggest that it is likely that a significant proportion of young offenders are overweight or obese. However, it is unclear from our research whether national overweight and obesity trends are consistent within YOIs. We recommend that this is explored in more detail to ensure evidence-based action is taken.

YouthLink Scotland recommends that statutory personal and social education (PSE) is integrated into educational programmes in YOIs. This should include content on mental health; young people’s rights; active citizenship and political participation; equality and respect; social justice; relationships, sex and parenthood. When delivered in partnership with young people and community partners where appropriate, we believe it would make a significant difference to reducing risky behaviour, especially risky sexual behaviour. PSE has been identified as a key component in HIV prevention. By covering parenting skills in PSE there is an opportunity to break the offending cycle.

The UNCRC Concluding Observations from June 2016 also included a recommendation that the UK ensure “meaningful sexual and reproductive health education is part of the mandatory school curriculum for all schools, including […] youth detention centres.”

Access to youth work provision in YOIs to support young people’s mental health would likely alleviate pressure on primary medical care and reduce the number of crisis interventions for young people. Youth work, due to its nature, can play a significant role in supporting young people who have experienced trauma and bereavement and those who are experiencing loneliness. Often young people who have experienced trauma have difficulties with attachment and forming relationships. Loneliness impacts on people’s mental and physical health, as well as their health behaviours. Through the youth work approach, young people are able to form trusting relationships with youth workers who support them to develop their confidence and resilience. This furthers young people’s feelings of self-worth and thus improves their general wellbeing.

13 Education Scotland, Outdoor Learning: practical guidance, ideas and support for teachers and practitioners in Scotland, p. 9-11
14 The Duke of Edinburgh’s Award, The Duke of Edinburgh’s Award: Making a difference with young people in custody – Executive Summary
15 Cancer Research UK, Scale Down Cancer, [accessed 24.02.17]
There should also be a consideration around how health care within YOIs can be better linked with health care and support in the community. Consistent and maintained support for young people leaving YOIs would likely minimise re-offending.

What are the current barriers to using the prison healthcare system/ improve the health outcomes of the prison population?

Our members identified the following barriers to improving health outcomes:

- *Ingrained [negative] behaviours of young people* - By the time young people are in a YOI, they have established negative health behaviours. It is difficult to re-establish these and promote healthy choices.
- *Staff knowledge* - Staff knowledge can be limited with regards to promoting healthy choices, including eating healthily. This could be overcome with further training and development.
- *Funding* - Members felt there was likely adequate funding to improve health outcomes but a shift in prioritisation was required.
- *The environment* - The secure setting can be a deterrent to external agencies supporting the work of YOIs.
- *Aftercare* - A barrier to sustainable reduction in health inequalities is the quality of aftercare support and community re-integration. Our members considered a more joined up approach in services and a single point of contact for young people in the community to be positive steps to improving aftercare. It would be beneficial if the single point of contact was taken up by a youth work practitioner in the community. The youth work approach would ensure that young people’s needs are addressed in a suitable setting.

What do you think the main pressures will be in the next 15 years?

It is clear to us that the secure setting is a melting pot of wider society and the problems facing wider society will also be mirrored in prisons. Our members identified two main concerns that they believe will worsen in the future: mental health problems and increasing levels of obesity.

The discussion and recommendations suggested here how these issues could be addressed more effectively.

Can you identify potential improvements to current services?

Our members cautioned that improvements must come from organisation-wide changes to ensure they are sustainable. YouthLink Scotland urges the Committee to consider the following recommendations:

- Improved data collection and analysis into overweight/obesity prevalence in YOIs
• Increased funding for youth work provision in YOIs
• Increased outdoor access for all young offenders
• Improved variety of nutritional meals that meet the needs of young offenders
• Increased involvement of young offenders in leading positive changes
• Improved after care support for young offenders