Transition Planning Processes for Young People Serving Custodial Sentences in New South Wales, Australia*

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The aim of the study was to identify transition planning processes as reported by participants for school-aged youth serving custodial sentences in New South Wales (NSW), Australia, and to establish the extent to which these reflect current evidence or research-based transition practices reported in the literature. The authors used inductive content analysis methodology to analyse interviews with 44 staff members from the education and juvenile justice systems in NSW. The findings of the study indicate that although a number of evidence/research-based practices are being used, there are some that still need to be implemented. Specifically, there is a need for more involvement of the families of incarcerated youth and support for the self-determination of the young people in custody.

Keywords: incarcerated youth, transition to community, transition planning processes, Taxonomy for Transition Programming 2.0

The outcomes for young people in the juvenile justice system have been historically poor, with recidivism rates estimated to be around 55% (Griller Clark & Unruh, 2010; Payne, 2007). Research has shown this population to be particularly vulnerable, with an estimated 40–70% having a disability or mental health issues (Hagner, Malloy, Mazzone, & Cormier, 2008). Many incarcerated young people come from unstable home and community environments, and lack a sense of connectedness to their schools due to negative experiences (Mathur & Griller Clark, 2013). Effective transition planning and processes have the potential to improve these outcomes (Anthony et al., 2010).

Transition, in regard to young people involved with the juvenile justice system, can be defined as

> *a coordinated set of activities for the youth, designed within an outcome-oriented process, which promotes successful movement from the community to a correctional program setting, and from a correctional program setting to post-incarceration activities. (Brock, O'Cummings, & Milligan, 2008, p. 3)*

Current literature shows that youths transitioning from incarceration back to the community experience a variety of issues that require a number of supports to facilitate

successful reintegration (Hagner et al., 2008). Re-engagement with education is crucial, as 43% of young people who re-enter the community without a high school diploma do not re-engage with education upon their release, and 60% of those who do end up dropping out (Hagner et al., 2008). There are several intra- and inter-organisational barriers that are possible reasons for this, including that students may experience inflexible enrolment policies, and/or restrictive placements in special education classrooms or alternative schools. Other risk factors for this population dropping out include poverty, inconsistent parenting, violent communities, high rates of unemployment, and inadequate housing (Nelson, Leone, & Rutherford, 2004).

The importance of mitigating these factors and supporting youth to engage in education immediately upon release cannot be overstated (Gagnon, Barber, Van Loan, & Leone, 2009). Hogan, Bullock, and Fritsch (2010) suggest that in order to accomplish this, the student's records should be transferred to the receiving school, and the student's teachers and classes should be assigned prior to enrolment. A meeting of parents, students, teachers, counsellors, a representative from the juvenile justice centre, and other relevant personnel should be conducted to identify possible difficulties for the students upon returning to the school and ensure that the student and parents understand the school policies.

Evidence-Based Practices

Gagnon et al. (2009) suggest that proper educational and transition planning and processes using evidence-based practices to promote transition to the community will prepare young people for engagement in education and/or employment upon release. They further state that it is imperative that this planning begins prior to discharge, preferably upon entry. When youth enter juvenile justice facilities, they must be assessed so that their strengths and needs in the areas of vocational skills, independent living, and academics are identified. This allows for planning for post-release with the provision of supports to engage in school or employment (Barton, Mackin, & Fields, 2008). Assessment is also used to guide important evidence-based practices such as the development of transition plans, monitoring of a young person's progress, and providing prerelease training.

Gagnon et al. (2009) recommend that collaborative leadership structures be established and systems and policies be put in place to support fidelity in planning and implementation. When programs are implemented with fidelity, recidivism can be reduced by as much as 46% (Lipsey, 2009). To accomplish this, Kapp, Petr, Robbins, and Choi (2013) recommend organising professional development opportunities across the involved sectors. They argue that this would mediate a mutual understanding between staff members of individual agencies and provide opportunities for communication. Similarly, Shufelt, Cocozza, and Skowyra (2010) highlighted the importance of co-location of staff members from all involved sectors, as this would provide space for building relationships and trust and for making decisions across sectors.

One important principle of transition planning is person-centredness and fostering self-determination (Baer & Flexer, 2013). As Halsey (2007) points out, the achievement of positive post-release outcomes is majorly affected by young people's involvement in transition planning. In other words, transition plans and goals need to align with the young person's plans and goals, and they must be given choice and voice. Therefore, it is imperative that staff members collaboratively work with incarcerated young people.

According to Martinez and Abrams (2013), family support is critical to the incarcerated young people returning to community. Family members can provide young people with material and emotional support, as well as motivation. Garfinkel (2010) argues that family

involvement may be challenging, given that families may not have the skills to participate in the transition planning process or to advocate for their children. Martinez and Abrams also pointed out that family members' excessive expectations may become a barrier in providing support to the young person, making family support a critical part of the transition process.

Transitioning youth back into the community gradually has been shown to improve transition outcomes. Dawes (2011) suggests that 'a graduated transition process' can reduce the difficulties incarcerated youth face finding suitable accommodation and employment after they return to the community. Within this process, a young person needs to be provided with accommodation and opportunities for employment and/or education. Mendes, Snow, and Baidawi (2014) further call for mandatory across-sector coordinated support provided to the young person post-release. This is best accomplished through wraparound services. Bertram, Suter, Bruns, and O'Rourke (2011) define wraparound services as involving 'a community-based, family-driven collaborative team planning process that engages informal supports and formal services with families in culturally competent, individualized, strengths-based assessment and interventions' (p. 713). This is especially important for incarcerated youth, as they often require support from many sectors in addition to juvenile justice and education (employment, housing, mental health, disability, and alcohol and other drugs [AOD]).

Walker (2008) suggests that employing the wraparound process will lead to improved self-efficacy, coping, and problem-solving abilities, which in turn will improve the effectiveness of the treatment and support. In order for wraparound to be successful, implementation fidelity of an evidence-based model such as the Rehabilitation, Empowerment, Natural supports, Education and Work (RENEW) transition model is imperative (Hagner et al., 2008). When implemented with adjudicated youth, RENEW included (a) person-centred planning, (b) support for high school completion, (c) career preparation and employment support, (d) multisystemic coordinated team meetings, and (e) an adult mentor and family assistance. These services should be coordinated by a career and education specialist and be guided by an interagency steering committee.

The Present Study

In order to provide effective transition supports and services to incarcerated youth that build on the strengths of existing transition planning processes, it is crucial that a clear understanding of the existing processes is established. Some studies exist that describe the transition process for incarcerated youth in the United States (see Hirschfield, 2014; Mathur & Griller Clark, 2013; Ochoa, 2016; Risler & O'Rourke, 2009). A thorough search of the literature revealed that few studies exist that discuss the transition back to community that incarcerated youth in Australia experience (see Dawes, 2011; Halsey, 2007; Jarvis, Beale, & Martin, 2000), and none that specifically examined actual transition processes in Australia. Further, there is a lack of scrutiny of the transition processes reported for alignment with research-based transition practices. In the present study, the researchers investigated the transition process for incarcerated youth who were sentenced to detention in juvenile justice centres in New South Wales (NSW), Australia, for 3 months or more. The transition process was examined from the perspectives of personnel from both the education and juvenile justice sectors. This article reports the results of one part of this study, which focused on the transition planning process for incarcerated youth, as well as the quality of the process. The following research questions guided this part of the study:

(1) What transition processes for incarcerated youth in NSW are reported by workers in the juvenile justice and education systems?

(2) To what extent do the reported transition planning processes of incarcerated youth in the NSW juvenile justice system reflect current evidence or research-based transition practices?

Methodology and Research Design

The Conceptual Framework

The conceptual frameworks guiding this study were the Taxonomy for Transition Programming 2.0 (Kohler, Gothberg, Fowler, & Coyle, 2016) and the Transition Toolkit 2.0 (Brock et al., 2008). The taxonomy was selected because it is a model focused on planning, organising, and evaluating transition education, services, and programs. It provides concrete practices based on research literature on effective programs and practices. The five integral categories of the transition process according to this model are (1) student-focused planning, (2) student development, (3) interagency and interdisciplinary collaboration, (4) family engagement, and (5) program structure and attributes. Each of these categories has a number of subcategories with associated practices.

The Transition Toolkit 2.0 (Brock et al., 2008) is a compilation of research-based practices for providing high-quality transition services for young people transitioning into, through, and out of the juvenile justice system. It is well aligned with Kohler's Taxonomy for Transition Programming 2.0 (Kohler et al., 2016), but contains practices specifically tailored to this population of young people. It is organised along a stages continuum: entry into the juvenile justice system, residency, exit from secure care, and aftercare. Within each stage, there are suggested activities based on evidence-based practices grouped by responsibility: facility (includes both juvenile justice and education staff), youth, family, and community/systems. The framework is an umbrella for practices suggested throughout the literature, such as those suggested by Kohler et al. (2016) and Gagnon (2009). The framework was therefore used to evaluate the quality of transition processes, and answer the second research question.

Settings and Participants

The research study took place in six NSW juvenile justice centres (JJCs). The NSW Department of Education maintains a school at each of the facilities, referred to as an education and training unit (ETU), for young people of mandatory school age serving custodial sentences. The participants ($N = 44$) in this study were

- the school principals ($n = 6$), assistant principals ($n = 3$), teachers ($n = 7$), a teacher's aide ($n = 1$), a school counsellor ($n = 1$), and a school transition specialist ($n = 1$);
- the juvenile justice facility managers ($n = 6$), and assistant managers ($n = 4$);
- other juvenile justice centre staff members who worked with incarcerated youth that had an understanding of transition processes; specifically, juvenile justice centre psychologists ($n = 2$), unit managers ($n = 2$), assistant unit managers ($n = 2$), a justice health community integration team clinician ($n = 1$), a representative of a nongovernmental organisation ($n = 1$), juvenile justice officers/community officers ($n = 3$), and youth officers/key workers ($n = 2$);
- a mainstream school principal ($n = 1$) and a mainstream schoolteacher ($n = 1$).

The participants comprised 22 females and 22 males, aged from 30 to 64 years, with an average age of 47 years. The length of the interviews ranged from 9:55 minutes to 80:59 minutes, with an average length of 35:44 minutes.

Research Process

Due to the variety of sectors involved in the study, ethical clearance was sought and obtained from the UNSW Sydney's Human Research Ethics Committee (HC15100), the NSW Department of Education, and the NSW Department of Juvenile Justice. Once clearance was obtained from all sectors, the researchers sent email invitations to the six principals of the education and training units, and the managers of the juvenile justice centres to invite them and their personnel to participate in the study. This email included information about the aims and expected outcomes of the study, risks, data handling, and confidentiality.

The researchers travelled to the participating sites and interviewed each participant at a mutually convenient time. The participants were asked a series of questions about the transition planning process and practices for incarcerated youth of mandatory school age. The interview protocols consisted of semistructured interview questions that were aligned with the Taxonomy of Transition Programming 2.0 and grounded in a literature review conducted by the authors. The interview protocols are available upon contacting the corresponding author of the article. The interviews were audio-recorded with the participants' permission, transcribed verbatim, and analysed using the inductive content analysis approach (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). Inductive content analysis is used when 'there is not enough former knowledge about the phenomenon or if this knowledge is fragmented' (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008, p. 109). Although there is a body of knowledge on transition planning in general, there is a dearth of literature on transition planning for adjudicated youth in Australia and internationally, thus inductive content analysis was an appropriate methodological choice for this study.

The interview transcriptions were used to create the units of analysis. A coding unit consisted of words, sentences, or paragraphs 'containing aspects related to each other through their content and context' (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004, p. 106). The second author and a research assistant independently coded two interviews. The first author compared the coded interviews, and any differences were resolved via discussion by the whole research team. Open coding (i.e., coding transcribed interviews for codes) of all of the transcribed interviews was conducted by the research assistant. The second author scrutinised the coded interviews and suggested adjustments to some of the codes. The research team repeatedly met, discussed, and resolved any differences. In the next stage of coding, the researchers created subcategories ($N = 286$), which were then aggregated into exhaustive categories (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004). The first and third authors then linked the underlying meanings in categories, which were aggregated into subthemes. Finally, the researchers derived seven key themes: (1) transition plans, (2) transition planning process, (3) youth assessment, (4) interagency collaboration, (5) incarcerated youth, (6) education at juvenile justice centres, and (7) juvenile justice centres. The theme 'transition planning process', which consisted of eight categories and 62 subcategories, is discussed here.

Investigator triangulation was used in every stage of data analysis, with all three authors and a research assistant involved to ensure credibility, validity, and trustworthiness of the process (Brantlinger, Jimenez, Klingner, Pugach, & Richardson, 2005; Whittemore, Chase, & Mandle, 2001). The authors also looked for negative cases once the preliminary

categories and themes were established and did not find any. In addition, a peer debriefing approach (discussing results with academics well versed in the area) was used. Lastly, the authors provide a thick, detailed description through the reporting of participant quotes to support their conclusions throughout the article.

The quality of the transition planning process by way of the use of research-based practice was determined by comparing the process as understood from the data analysis to the four stages of the Transition Toolkit 2.0 (Brock et al., 2008). The first author constructed a table with rows that listed each domain and the practices within. Columns were added for evidence, some evidence/inferred, and no evidence. She then used the coded transcripts to determine which practices in each domain were discussed in the interviews as being employed by either the JJC or the ETU, and marked these on the table in the appropriate columns. The second and third authors reviewed the table for accuracy, and any differences were resolved via discussion by the whole research team.

Results

The transition planning process theme yielded eight categories: (a) transition planning, (b) staff training in transition planning, (c) barriers to transition planning, (d) supports in transition planning, (e) transition meetings, (f) case conferences, (g), transition goals, and (h) planning for accommodation. The following text is not divided according to these categories but rather key findings, many of which match the category name (i.e., categories 'Barriers to transition planning' and 'Supports in transition planning' are discussed under one heading 'Supports and barriers to transition planning'; the categories 'Transition meetings', 'Case conferences', and 'Planning for accommodation' are discussed under the heading 'Transition meetings and case conferences', with all remaining categories matching the heading titles).

Transition Planning

The category 'transition planning' largely centred around the time spent on transition planning, the staff involved in transition planning, and the process of transition planning. The reported time spent on transition planning varied across and within the two sectors, from as little as 4 hours to 100% of the time. It can be surmised from participant responses that this difference can be attributed to whether the participant was speaking philosophically or pedantically: 'Out here, everything works towards transition planning. Every hour is around that. So, right from 4:30 in the morning, when the doors are unlocked . . . So, everything here is about transition' (P28PSJJC). Another possibility is the fact that it is done whenever staff can fit it in. This is reflected in the following comment: 'It's not time set aside' (P18MJJC). Also, the diverse needs of each individual young person influence the time spent on transition planning and programming: 'Very difficult to quantify, again, because of the individual cases. Some kids are really straightforward . . . Other cases are far more complex for a number of different reasons' (P3JJCM).

Staff involved in transition planning. When speaking of transition planning, the majority of the participants first spoke about what parties were involved from the JJC, ETU, and outside agencies. One point that is important to mention is that transition planning was seen as a collaborative effort that included the young person and family; although it was sometimes difficult logistically, it was done to ensure the success of the students, as the following quotes illustrate:

> *. . . it's a fairly collaborative thing, and the more people we can have involved in that process, including the student, the more successful it will be. (P13PRS)*

> *I work with every stakeholder for each of these young people, from clinical to education, to transition, to just the youth officers here, to even the young people themselves. We work with everyone. Everybody that's involved, and, in particular, their families. (P25NGOR)*

It must also be noted that upon further analysis, it was revealed that family involvement was actually limited to participation in the exit conferences.

Staff from the JJCs that were involved included the (a) unit manager, (b) youth officer (student's key worker), (c) centre psychologists, (d) other youth officers, and (e) program staff. Staff from the ETUs acknowledged that their role in transition planning was limited to education, unlike that of schools outside juvenile justice centres. Staff from ETUs that were involved in transition planning comprised the transition specialist, assistant principal, teachers, and counsellors. In some cases, the school that the student would be enrolling in upon discharge would have input. Staff from this school might include the high school year adviser, or members of the learning support team such as a head teacher, welfare worker, or student support officer. It was clear that the staff involved depended on the needs of the young person, for example, if he or she had an identified disability.

It was discovered that the involvement of outside agencies was dependent on the location of the JJC, the needs of the student, and the availability of services:

> *. . . it depends on the young person, but typically it would be the caseworker, the unit manager at the centre, or the key worker at the centre, the . . . if they're going to [alcohol and other drugs] AOD, and they usually are going to some sort of counselling, so the counsellor would be involved . . . The Technical and Further Education (TAFE) counsellor is often too busy to come to that kind of thing, so you don't often get those, although you'll get information from them to kind of present . . . Joint Support Program, . . . It's an NGO partner that comes in and specifically works intensively with young people, so they would be involved if they're a likely referral, . . . JSP worker, the family, definitely are involved. They're key players. If you've got — say you've got a young person coming from a particular area, and we're trying to encourage cultural roots, et cetera, then some of the elders might be involved. At times it'll be health workers, so you'll get people from AMS involved . . . (P12JJO)*

Aboriginal elders might also be involved in the transition planning and practices if the young person consents to it, as they are seen as 'a good support network, by all means, but we do ask the detainee before we do that, and then because the elders build the rapport up' (P8JJCM). Some of the ETUs involved Aboriginal education officers in the development of the transition plan: 'We develop a plan with the help of our Aboriginal education officer, so we know where to go and what their interests are right from the beginning' (P21TETU).

Transition planning process JJC. Participants from the JJC viewed transition from the point that the young people enter the centre to the point that they are released back into the community. Therefore, when asked about the process of transition, they began with the young person's entry into the centre and the induction that takes place when they first arrive. This involves the assignment of a caseworker to the young person, who interviews the young person to determine his or her capabilities, support needs, preferences, and goals (see Table 1). The youth will also be assessed by a psychologist and justice health to determine any health, mental health, and AOD issues. The youth officer then takes this information and writes a plan, which is presented at the initial case conference:

> *I think we've got a really good system going because we've got an induction group where two staff pick up all the new admissions and take them through the centre orientation part. So, from there, they complete the centre induction, and an intervention plan is drawn up. (P38AAMGJJ)*

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TABLE 1

Transition Planning Process

Process component	Juvenile justice centre	Education and training unit
Student arrives at JJC	Induction Assignment of a caseworker Caseworker interviews young person to determine capabilities, support needs, preferences, and goals Psychologist and justice health conduct assessments to determine any health, mental health, and alcohol or other drug issues Youth officer writes plan	Induction Assistant principal (AP) enrols student Initial interview is conducted by AP to determine goals, strengths, weaknesses If relevant, Aboriginal education officer introduces self and has a discussion with student
Post-induction	Initial case conference Caseworker liaises with youth, family, unit manager Plan is presented	Enrolment Assessment of academic skills is conducted School counsellor contacts previous schools and other stakeholders Classroom teacher writes individual learning plan (ILP) and transition plan
During incarceration	Monitoring and evaluation Caseworker implements plan Caseworker liaises with youth, family, unit manager Unit manager meets with youth weekly to assess progress, revise goals if necessary, and set short-term goals for the following week Caseworker and assistant manager meet for monthly case reviews Case conferences convened every 3 months	Education-related activities Teaching and learning according to ILP and transition plan Plans reviewed by classroom teacher and student each week Transition specialist liaises with JJC by attending case conferences Transition specialist also liaises with student and outside agencies to prepare a plan for when student is released — school, Technical and Further Education (TAFE), work
Discharge	Preparing for release Community manager conducts risk assessments in different criminogenic domains Discharge case conference	Preparing for release Transition specialist prepares materials for student Transition specialist attends discharge case conference
Upon release	Monitoring and support Caseworker liaises with youth to assess adherence to plan Caseworker offers support in various areas: transportation, health, accommodation, education	No contact with student once student is discharged from JJC

The caseworker is responsible for implementing the plan, and liaises with the young person, family, and the unit manager. Progress on the plan is discussed and transition planning takes place throughout the young person's sentence during monthly updates and case reviews that are attended by the caseworker and assistant manager. For youth with longer sentences, there are case conferences every 3 months, finally terminating in a discharge case conference. As described by P43UMJJC, 'They would have a 3-monthly case conference, and a case review each month, and then a discharge case conference.' The last step in the process mentioned by the participants is that the caseworker liaises with the youth to make sure that she or he is following the plan and offers support, if necessary.

Transition planning process ETU. The participants from the ETU described a similar transition process to that of the JJC (see Table 1). Once the young person is enrolled in

school, the assistant principal conducts an induction, which includes an initial interview to discover the young person's goals, strengths, and weaknesses. If appropriate, an Aboriginal education officer also speaks to the young person. Next, the assistant principal assesses the young person's academic skills. The school counsellor contacts the student's previous schools, and any other relevant stakeholders, in order to facilitate a transfer of records. The classroom teacher then takes the information provided from the interview, assessment, and records and writes an individual learning plan and a transition plan. The student is very involved in the writing of this plan and reviews the plan with the teacher on a weekly basis. The school's transition specialist liaises with the student, the JJC, and outside agencies to set up a plan for the student's transition back into the community. This plan usually would include schooling, work, and independent living needs: 'We were talking about community support networks, accommodation, employment, community involvement, personal items . . . when I say that, your photo ID, Medicare, white card . . . resume. We do a fair bit of that sort of stuff with them' (P31APETU).

Lastly, the transition specialist would represent the ETU at the discharge case conference. Due to confidentiality, the ETU has no part in transition planning and follow-up once the young person leaves the centre:

> *It's very much cut off, and that's it, you know? (. . .) I've been under the impression that it's been a legal thing. We can't contact them or their families, because by rights it's all confidential, them having been here. (P29TETU)*

Staff Training in Transition Planning

Participants from the JJC explained that youth officers receive 4 weeks of mandatory face-to-face induction training. Transition planning is a part of this induction training, which continues on the job. Caseworkers were cited as receiving the most training in the area of transition planning, as 'they'll often be the ones who are chasing up accommodation and things like that, rather than the Centre.' (P22PJJC)

According to participants, the transition officers were the only staff in the ETU to receive formal training in the area of transition planning and practice. This training, however, was generic career development training for high school students delivered by the NSW Department of Education, and not designed for young people in juvenile justice (JJ) returning back to the community. Part of the transition specialists' role is to then take any information gained during training and share with the rest of the ETU staff.

Participants from both sectors indicated a desire for more training, particularly in the area of transition planning. Another area of training need that was mentioned was training in the roles that the different sectors have in transition planning:

> *I've had no transition planning training at all . . . (. . .) . . . so I'm just getting word of mouth from colleagues. You'll say, 'Can we do this?' Nup. Can't do it. It's not our responsibility. That's a JJ responsibility. Or, that's their Juvenile Justice key worker. So yeah, everything I'm doing is kind of out of left field, and winging it, really, I have to say, because there's nothing in place or in a plan as such to know 'This is my job, and this is what I need to do. This is the time frame I've got to do it'. I don't know any of that. (P6REPTU)*

Other participants felt that the experiential training they received in the course of doing their jobs was sufficient and the most valuable.

Supports and Barriers to Transition Planning

The community caseworker was revealed to be one of the greatest supports in the transition process. Participants found them to be proactive, supportive, and knowledgeable about

the young people and their communities. Their positive contributions included locating and liaising with outside support agencies and programs, developing a close supportive relationship with the incarcerated young person, and communicating with families. One participant stated,

> *I think most JJO's, caseworkers, are their greatest support, because a number of your caseworkers go that extra mile. They know these kids, they've known them a long time, they know their families, they know their circumstances, so they will give whatever it is that they need to do to support them . . . (P11AMJJC)*

Interestingly, another support mentioned was the juvenile justice system itself. Reasons for this were accountability, opportunity for education, food, shelter, support, lack of AOD, and safety:

> *. . . so it's not always a negative thing to be here, and kids will come, just because they know that, firstly, they've got a warm bed. They're getting food. There's no drugs here and they're getting support to get themselves clean and strong to go back out. (P11AMJJC)*

Post-release programs were also named as a support; however, the lack thereof was also mentioned as a barrier to successful transition processes.

According to participants, the biggest barrier faced by incarcerated youth transitioning back to home and the community was returning to the dysfunctional situations they came from, both at home and in their communities. One participant described the return to a dysfunctional family:

> *. . . when they're out, sometimes their families don't help at all, you know? If they're going back straight into a house full of drugs, a house full of alcohol, a house that doesn't worry too much if your kid goes to school or not . . . what else. (P14KWJJC)*

Another participant spoke about returning to a dysfunctional community:

> *Often we send them back to the same dysfunctional community that they've come from, so they'll go back into a culture where there's a high rate of unemployment, a high rate of substance abuse going on, a high rate of crime, and it's very much normalised for them . . . (P22PJJC)*

Returning to the community was a barrier primarily in the rural and remote areas where there was often a lack of services such as public transport, which was a problem in that many educational and health services were a great distance away. Employment in these areas was often scarce, and with no transportation available to them, young people were limited in accessing jobs outside the area:

> *I guess there's always the transport and logistics issue. It's all well and good to say, 'Go and get a job, buddy', but you don't have a licence and you don't have the means to get a vehicle, and the nearest job is 50 k's away . . . I think health services have improved in western NSW significantly, but that's still always an ongoing issue. The availability of education and training . . . Even for people that may obtain an apprenticeship, if you're making 150 bucks a week . . . a low income, and you need to travel to [another area] to do 3 days' worth of TAFE a month, that's certainly a roadblock. (P3JJCM)*

Other barriers mentioned impeded the planning process itself. These were not knowing the date of the young person's release or what area he or she was being released to, short sentences, large catchment area, and issues coordinating services, particularly education, where schools were sometimes reluctant to enrol young people transitioning from a juvenile justice centre.

Transition Meetings and Case Conferences

The term 'transition planning meetings' is generally used by the ETU personnel, whereas the term 'case conferences' is used by those associated with the JJC, as the young person's transition is planned during those meetings. Both terms will be used here, depending on who provided the information. The participants from both the ETUs and JJCs spoke about the young person's involvement in transition meetings. Their responses varied from 'They don't attend those' (P24APETU) to 'The young person is *always* in the meeting, yes' (P11AMJJC). Young people are required to attend case conference meetings during their incarceration. Although the young people did not always attend transition planning meetings, their input was frequently collected before the meeting at reviews with a transition specialist or key worker:

> *. . . they are part of it, so they would be talked through, you know, 'Is this something that you would want to do?' And as part of a review, it would be, well, 'How are you going in your subjects? Is there anything that's causing issues?' (P13PRS)*

Participants from both sectors agreed that although young people were given the opportunity to contribute when in attendance at their meetings, they rarely did. They attributed this to the fact that young people felt disempowered in the company of so many adults and were uncomfortable speaking up, or were simply disinterested (P12JJO, P9YO). They felt that youths needed encouragement, prompting, and support during the meetings in order to feel comfortable participating. Families were always encouraged to attend and contribute to case conferences. Neither the young person or family had input into the meeting agendas.

Case conferences were primarily conducted to '. . . cover as many bases as you can, in terms of education, health, whether they need certain levels of clinical support outside' (P9YO). In order to accomplish this, the case conferences are attended by a variety of stakeholders:

> *. . . your unit manager, your key worker, your caseworker in the community, JJ caseworkers, which is now Juvenile Justice Officer. Generally, a nurse will come — whoever the specialist staff, whether it be the psychologist or the AOD, whichever one is assigned, certainly school. Family are quite often involved. Sadly, not always, but quite often. And then the young person. And post-release, sometimes, if they require post-release, post-release will be involved. Sometimes even a chaplain is involved. (P11AMJJC)*

If certain stakeholders are unavailable to attend the meeting, they typically send a report with information to share.

The case plan, which includes a plan for transitioning back into the community, is developed at the case conference from the information provided by the attendees at the meeting.

There are case conferences every 3 months during the young person's incarceration, and the case plan is updated accordingly. In between those conferences, case reviews are held between the young person, key worker, and unit manager to discuss the current case plan and the young person's progress and goals.

The discharge case conference is the final transition meeting before the young person is released from custody. This conference is focused on accommodation, health, education, employment, and finances. The key worker and unit manager use this time to collate the separate plans from the various stakeholders and set up support in the community. The conference results in a plan for the young person: 'We provide them with an information package for their area, which has all the employment agencies, sporting organisations,

community-based information, so yeah, that goes with them. It's like part of their transition package that we put out' (P10TSETU).

Transition Goals

Writing transition goals is an integral activity during transition planning meetings. One participant summed up the importance of transition goals to a young person:

> . . . focusing on goals is extremely important and instrumental in terms of where they're going, and making sure that they know where they're going, and when they're ready to go there, basically. So it's not only to do with transition. It's embedded throughout their education, and it flows through to their education in terms of differentiation of curriculum, so we're looking at their needs, their educational needs, but also their transitional needs and their future needs as well, in one package. (P17PETU)

Participants also stressed the importance of students setting their own goals, both educationally and vocationally. There was some discussion of the need to teach students how to set their own goals and align them to their future plans. Staff encouraged young people to set short-term goals (what they can achieve during custody) and long-term goals (for transition into the community). Goals were designed for different areas of the young person's life: ' . . . you've got family and living, education and employment, drugs and alcohol, peer relations, that type of thing' (P4AUM).

Once a young person's goals were established, they remained on the unit in hard copy form, as well as being inputted into the Client Information System. The unit manager reviewed the goals with the young person weekly to assess progress and revise the goals if necessary, and set short-term goals for the week ahead.

Quality of Transition Planning Processes

The quality of the transition planning process by way of the use of research-based practice was determined by comparing the process as understood from the data analysis to the Transition Toolkit 2.0 (Brock et al., 2008). If a practice was specifically mentioned by one or more participant, it was coded as 'evidence'. If a practice was described as or partly implemented or not specifically mentioned but its existence was implied by one or more participants, it was coded as 'some evidence/inferred'. If there was no mention of a practice at all, it was coded as 'no evidence'.

The toolkit is organised into four stages: (a) Entrance into the system, (b) Residence, (c) Exit from the system, and (d) Aftercare. There are 10 practices listed under the first stage; evidence was found that suggested that four of these were being implemented consistently across sectors and centres. Three practices not mentioned by any participants were concerned with families and included: make support systems available to families, provide the family with an orientation to the school program and educational opportunities available, and request family help in obtaining educational records. Some evidence was found to support the remaining three practices (see Table 2 for details).

The second stage, Residence, also comprised 10 practices. Data analysis found evidence that three of these were being implemented in the transition planning for incarcerated youth (see Table 2). Four practices had no evidence of implementation, and again, they pertained to family. There was some evidence that three practices associated with record keeping were being implemented within each sector, but not across sectors.

The third stage, Exit from the system, had nine practices associated with it. Only two of the practices, begin prelease information sharing and engage families in all decision-making processes, had clear evidence of implementation. There was some evidence that the

TABLE 2

Quality of Transition Planning based on Transition Toolkit 2.0

Stage	Practice	Evidence	Some evidence/ inferred	No evidence	No evidence
Entrance into the system					
	Conduct intake assessments	X			
	Assemble a transition team and develop a transition plan	X			
	Define roles and responsibilities of individuals involved in youth transition clearly to aid in open communication		X		
	Track and monitor youth progress	X			
	Refer youth to diversion or community-based programs, when appropriate		X		
	Request records that will facilitate appropriate referrals and provide needed services and supports	X			
	Identify a single person to manage all youth records on entry		X		
	Make support systems available to families			X	
	Provide the family with an orientation to the school program and educational opportunities available			X	
	Request family help in obtaining educational records			X	
Residence					
	Continue activities initiated at entry	X			
	Provide prerelease training and supports	X			
	Ensure appropriate educational placements	X			
	Make sure records maintenance procedures are well defined and clearly communicated to staff		X		
	Designate one staff member to be responsible for maintaining youth records		X		
	Update youth records regularly, including conducting regular assessments to document youth progress		X		
	Send progress updates to family, home school, and other members of the transition team			X	
	Offer programs to families to develop and hone their parenting skills			X	
	Enhance family involvement through family counselling			X	
	Continue to make the school an inviting place to families			X	

TABLE 2

Continued

Stage	Practice	Evidence	Some evidence/ inferred	No evidence	No evidence
Exit from the system					
	Begin prerelease information sharing	X			
	Conduct a prerelease visit to the school			X	
	Start transitional counselling and continue mentoring		X		
	Release youth records in a timely and secure manner		X		
	Collaborate and communicate with individuals and agencies to overcome challenges and barriers associated with sharing youth information		X		
	Engage families in all decision-making processes	X			
	Prepare families for changes in their child			X	
	Make the transition process as gradual as possible		X		
	Facilitate self-determination within the planning process			X	
Aftercare					
	Provide transitional counselling		X		
	Ensure follow-up and monitoring		X		
	Supply wraparound support services			X	

following practices were being employed: transitional counselling and mentoring, release records in a timely manner, collaborate with other stakeholders, and make the transitional process gradual. The reason for inclusion of the last practice under the category of some evidence was that many times the JJC and ETU were not notified of a youth's pending release in time to gradually transition him or her back into the community. Practices that were missing included prerelease visit to the receiving school, prepare families for changes in their child, and facilitate self-determination in the planning process.

The last stage, Aftercare, contains only three practices, and was revealed to be the weakest stage in regard to the use of research-based practices. Examination of the evidence revealed that two of the practices, provide transitional counselling and ensure follow-up and monitoring, were being implemented sporadically. There was no evidence that the final practice, supply wraparound services, was being executed at all.

Discussion

This study set out to discover what the transition processes were for incarcerated youth in the NSW juvenile justice system, and to what extent the transition planning process of incarcerated youth in the NSW juvenile justice system reflects current evidence or research-based transition practices. Both questions were answered through interviewing personnel from the juvenile justice and education sectors at juvenile justice centres in NSW, Australia.

As participants described the transition process, it became clear that all school-age youth had transition plans, particularly if they had a sentence of 3 or more months. Participants from the JJC and ETU sectors described how the transition process worked and what their part in it was. The results indicated that the transition processes varied across sectors (see Table 1 for details). This is consistent with previous research conducted by Gagnon et al. (2009) and Mathur and Griller Clark (2013).

The participants reflected on training in transition planning, which was targeted to specific positions only (e.g., caseworkers within the JJCs and transition specialists within the ETUs received professional development targeted at transition planning). This is problematic, as in order for the transition planning process to be effective, all staff involved need to have an understanding of this process (Gagnon et al., 2009). The participating staff called for training opportunities in this area, with a specific focus on the roles that the involved sectors/systems and their staff members have in a transition process. It became clear during the interviews that employees across sectors used different terminology for the same matters. For example, education staff members talked about 'transition planning meetings', but the juvenile justice staff members used the term 'case conferences'. Opportunities for professional development across sectors would therefore also provide opportunities for developing a common language, or at least understanding the language used in individual sectors.

The participants discussed some of the barriers that make the transition outcomes difficult to achieve. These included young people's return to dysfunctional families and/or communities and a lack of public transport in rural and remote areas, which often resulted in young people's dropping out of school or loss of employment. Transitioning youths back into the community gradually would provide time and support to find suitable accommodation, enrol in school or procure employment, and coordinate any necessary supports.

The participants disclosed that although incarcerated young people were given opportunities to contribute, when they attended the transition planning meeting, they rarely opted to do so. This was attributed to a number of factors: feeling disempowered in the room full of adults from different sectors, being disengaged, and/or needing encouragement and support to participate. Furthermore, young people did not have any input into the meeting agendas. The participants did not provide any indication of facilitating self-determination of the incarcerated young people, which is one of the research-based practices in the Transition Toolkit 2.0. This is an alarming finding that demonstrates a lack of person-centred planning and preparation of incarcerated young people to meaningfully participate in the transition planning process, which are recommended by much of the research literature (Baer & Flexer, 2013; Halsey, 2007; Kohler et al., 2016).

The quality of the transition planning process was established by matching the interviews with the research-based practices outlined in the Transition Toolkit 2.0. There were a number of research-based practices used in the transition planning process at juvenile justice centres in NSW. These included a variety of assessment across the four stages, development of transition plans, monitoring of a young person's progress, and providing prerelease training. Other practices had only some evidence (see Table 2), and there were practices that were not evidenced in the interviews at all. These were mostly related to families of incarcerated young people, which is a troubling finding. For example, none of the participants mentioned available support systems for families once a young person enters the juvenile justice system. Families also seemed to not receive progress updates, nor were they offered programs that would assist them in further development of their parenting skills. None of the participants mentioned that the families of the incarcerated

youth would be prepared prerelease for possible changes in their child. This is antithetical to evidence from juvenile justice research and transition frameworks, which suggest that working with families throughout the transition process (i.e., from entry into the juvenile justice system through post-release) is essential, especially when it comes to preparing families for changes in their child and having realistic expectations (Brock et al., 2008; Kohler et al., 2016; Martinez & Abrams, 2013). Burke, Mulvey, Schubert, and Garbin (2014) pointed out that although juvenile justice personnel often recognise the potential value of family involvement, methods of successfully engaging families of incarcerated youth are still not clear. Therefore, there is a need for research focused on the meaningful involvement of incarcerated youth in the transition planning process while taking into consideration tensions of service provisions within the juvenile justice system. As Burke et al. put it, family involvement is 'the most operationally challenging issue facing the juvenile system' (p. 40).

Another research-based practice outlined in the Transition Toolkit 2.0, but not evidenced in the interviews, was the existence of wraparound support services. This is problematic, as youths involved with the juvenile justice system often have complex needs that call for a variety of supports from different sectors. The participants attributed problems with the young people's re-entry into the community to a lack of collaboration and communication among the various stakeholders, particularly post-release. They called for alignment of policies and processes between the juvenile justice and education sectors so that everyone was 'on the same page'. They also mentioned difficulties with bringing the various sectors together for planning meetings and the counterproductivity that occurs when communication is lacking. When implemented with fidelity, wraparound services have the potential to mitigate these problems (Hagner et al., 2008).

Strengths and Limitations

The study's main strength is a qualitative research design, thus allowing participants to share their perspectives and experiences, as well as suggestions for improvement. The second strength of this study lies in the diversity of the participants. The participants were from various sectors and worked in diverse positions, which allowed for an in-depth understanding about the current state of transition planning in the NSW juvenile justice system. Third, this is the first study of its kind undertaken in NSW (Australia) that included participants across various systems and focused on actual transition planning processes.

There were also some limitations to the study. As not all personnel from each centre were interviewed, and information about processes was gleaned only from those that were, no conclusions can be made about the consistency of the implementation of these processes across employees, sectors, or centres. Another limitation of this study is that the conclusions reached were based on self-reports of the participants, not observations. Inversely, some of the missing practices may actually be occurring on a small scale that was not picked up by the interviews. Third, incarcerated youth were not included as participants in this study, thus their experiences and perspectives were not captured.

Recommendations and Conclusions

There are a number of recommendations resulting from this study. First, there is a greater need for systematic collaboration between the involved sectors, which could be facilitated by creating across-sector professional training opportunities, time, and resources allocated for team planning, and clear allocation of roles and responsibilities of the stakeholders including accountability processes. Collaboration could be facilitated by

implementing a transition framework or program across sectors, which resembles a wraparound model. Second, families of the incarcerated youth need to be more systematically involved throughout the transition process, which starts with the young person's entry into the juvenile justice system. Supports such as family counselling, providing programs for families, sending them updates about their children's progress, and preparing them for the return of their child are essential. The collaboration with families also includes requesting their help in the transition process. Third, there is a need for the systematic development of a young person's self-determination skills. In order to make the transition planning process effective, the young person needs to be meaningfully involved and supported. After all, without the young person's buy-in, the process of transition back to the community will be yet another thing ' . . . done *to* them and *for* them and only rarely *with* them (and with their consent)' (Halsey, 2007, p. 1227).

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