



## **T2A response to the National Audit Office study on improving resettlement support for prison leavers to reduce reoffending**

### **Scope of the NAO study**

The study will look at the government's approach to improving prisoner resettlement, with a particular focus on adult prison leavers in England and Wales. It will examine:

- whether the Ministry has applied learning from previous resettlement delivery arrangements;
- the government's early progress in improving resettlement services; and
- what government has to get right to improve resettlement services in the future.

### **What is the Government's current performance?**

To our knowledge there are no specific Commissioned Rehabilitative Services for young adults commissioned by HMPPS via the Dynamic Framework. There is a lack of transparency about what is happening in each area as well as what the outcomes of these Services are for particular cohorts. We are aware of some areas of good practice which the NAO could usefully examine, for example, the Wellbeing Hubs commissioned in Greater Manchester by the Combined Authority using devolved funding for rehabilitation will include a young adult focus and the wider young adult project in Greater Manchester, Merseyside and Cheshire (GMMC) being led by HMPPS. In T2A's view, the latter is an excellent example of the potential for a whole system approach which could be replicated in other areas as part of the One HMPPS agenda as it unites a range of local partners to implement nine workstreams focused on improving practice for young adults. This includes a focus on resettlement through accommodation, education and training and family pathways as well as an emphasis on practitioners working through an '[identity lens](#)' with young adults to foster positive future orientation--known to be crucial for desistance—in sentence planning and practice. The GMMC project also illustrates the importance of needs analysis, monitoring the impact of activity across partnerships--rather than solely for the probation service—and regional oversight of outcomes for the specific cohort of young adults aged 18-25. Nevertheless, the project is time-limited and there is a risk that the new practices that are emerging from it will regress without ongoing impetus from HMPPS. T2A would also like to see a greater emphasis on expectations of the involvement of young adults and their families in resettlement planning and practice.

Transforming Rehabilitation stripped important resettlement services out of prisons, and it will take time and resources to embed their return. The evidence-based orthodoxy of end-to-end sentence management which included planning for release and resettlement from the start of a prison sentence has been lost in the process. This makes it even more important for the MOJ and HMPPS to understand the impact of new and emerging practice and strengthen the evidence base through robust research which was neglected during the previous model. It is not clear to us what role the Ministry of Justice is now playing in fostering that. This is apparent in the focus of the Target Operating Model (TOM) on volume-based metrics rather than long-term outcomes.

T2A is funding the University of Salford to explore with HMPPS how to develop constructive resettlement practice with young adults. Early work has highlighted how current assessment, sentence planning, and resettlement processes do not enable staff to work in ways that facilitate desistance through identity-shift due to them being built heavily on risk-based approaches. This means that current practice is not aligned to what helps desistance for the individual, who may not see it as relevant, and it does not enable agencies to work together on a shared plan.

### **What does the government need to do to improve resettlement services?**

The Edinburgh Study of Youth Transitions and Crime has found that adverse childhood experiences and trauma in adulthood--such as bereavement, relationship breakdown or serious accident or illness--affects people's ability to stay away from crime. Resettlement practice for young adults should focus on better understanding developing maturity and creating appropriate pathways for young adults, including those with care experience, trauma, and/or neurodiverse needs. One important feature of young adulthood is that the brain 'prunes' unnecessary synaptic connections and is able to rewire itself. This plasticity means that young adulthood is a particularly good time to promote the development of positive neural connections through providing opportunities for learning, personal growth, and the development of pro-social identities. Nevertheless, by virtue of their developmental status, young adults can quickly become disillusioned and disengaged from professionals if support is not sufficient, relevant, or timely. Engagement with young adults and resulting resettlement arrangements should be based on the [Constructive Resettlement](#) framework, which would allow both prison staff and probation staff to all operate with a common focus on facilitating a prisoner's identity-shift, which is needed for desistance. Constructive Resettlement has been adopted into the Youth Custody Service as its theory of change and built into the MOJ National Standards for Youth Offending Teams and is being built into Case Management Guidance. T2A would like to see a similar approach being taken to community rehabilitation for adults with the TOM being updated to require distinct resettlement services to be commissioned for young adults.

T2A's research has illustrated that young adults also need practical support to deal with the challenges of transitioning to adulthood, develop positive identities and resilience to promote desistance. There is currently an absence of strategic thought about what happens once a person comes to the end of the community supervision element of their custodial sentence and is no longer eligible for support by the Probation Service. Another significant gap relates to what resettlement should mean for people released from prison after being on remand for a significant period during such a crucial time for their maturational development. There are also enduring problems with finding suitable accommodation for young adults being released who represent a high risk of harm and who also have complex mental health or neurodiverse needs. T2A's work with EQUAL and the Agenda Alliance has shown us that there remains significant work to be done to develop gender-appropriate, race-appropriate and culturally-competent community-based resettlement support which are chronically underfunded.

The MOJ should play a stronger role across government to address structural inequalities hindering desistance including young adults' lesser social housing entitlement, lower minimum wage, access to parenting support, and the long-term detrimental effect of childhood criminal records. The NAO could also usefully investigate the government's plans to roll out practices being tested through resettlement pilots focused on employment and accommodation and the Shared Outcomes Fund Prison Leavers Project. T2A is also aware that young adults often do not meet the thresholds for mainstream mental health and substance misuse services, for example.