



# Always Hope

**Supporting young adults with  
experience of care and custody**

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**Handbook 2023**



Based on the piloting of Always Hope in the West Midlands, we have developed this handbook and accompanying manual to help staff in other regions implement the protocols and practices that have been delivered; aiming to improve the way that care experienced young adults receive support whilst in prison and on release.

**Since 2019, Always Hope has been supporting young adults (aged 18-25) with care leaver status in prison and on release to improve their chances of rehabilitation. We have done this by developing and piloting new approaches to the way the young adults are supported.**

**This new solution brings practitioners from prison, probation and local authority leaving care and Family Finding Services (such as LifeLong Links) together with the young adults to integrate the practitioners support and help the young adults to identify and build supportive social networks.**

## **This handbook will:**

- Describe the Always Hope approach and the impact it has had on staff and young adults in the West Midlands
- Explain why care experienced young adults in custody and in the community may be particularly vulnerable and need additional support
- Share our design principles for Always Hope as provocations for ongoing work
- Help practitioners understand their role in Always Hope and the benefits of working in this way
- Describe how practitioners will know if they've been successful in implementing the approach
- Provide links to a detailed description of how to implement Always Hope



## The context – Care experienced young adults in the justice system

Care experienced young adults (18-25 years old) are over-represented in the prison system. Approximately 25% of all adult prisoners have had experience of care, compared to 1% of the general population. The majority (63%) of children entering the care system have experienced abuse or neglect and the impact of this can be exacerbated by their experience of being in care, as the care system itself, as well as any past trauma can have a profound impact on the young adults.

There is a proven correlation between maintenance of family relationships and reduced reoffending. However, many care leavers lack family support and other positive relationships, and are sometimes more vulnerable to negative social networks such as gangs and unhealthy, exploitative relationships - increasing their risk of getting involved in crime.

Developing effective systems for identifying care experienced people in prison presents a challenge and data is not routinely collected about this group. This leads to little understanding about their outcomes in comparison to those who have not been in care.

Limited resources and high caseloads mean practitioners from prison, probation and leaving care services rarely share their expertise and ideas with each other, despite often supporting the same person.

In addition to this, communication between services can be patchy and it is not common for there to be a clear plan on how practitioners collaborate and jointly support these young adults, meaning that sometimes opportunities to work together are missed e.g. finding suitable housing or employment.

There is a lack of clarity between practitioners about each other's roles, which creates duplications and gaps in service provision and makes it difficult for the young adults to know what support they can expect to receive and from whom.

There are, however, pockets of good practice, often due to the commitment of individual staff or small teams, who are persistent in providing support and providing exemplary care and commitment.

# Key principles underpinning the Always Hope approach

To effectively offer support we must:



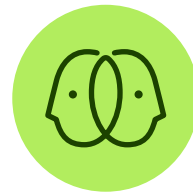
Improve systems for identifying care leavers as early as possible, as this is crucial for maximising support



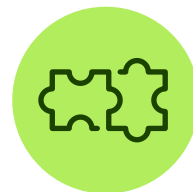
Listen to care experienced young adults, and put them at the centre of all decision making and service provision



Ensure that practitioners from different services are clear about each others roles and responsibilities and that the young men are clear on who is responsible for offering what type of support and when



Hold a shared understanding and plan for addressing the care experienced young adult's strengths, needs, risks and vulnerabilities



Ensure that a collaborative, joined up approach to supporting and planning with the young adults is in place during resettlement planning and after their release from custody



Consider risk holistically and calculate best interests, risk to self (harm or exploitation) and risk of reoffending



Ensure that **racism is actively recognised** as having a profound impact on the lives of many of the young adults, including the role the social care and criminal justice systems have had in perpetuating this inequality

# Key Stakeholders

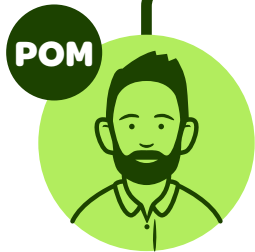
Always Hope encourage the practitioners supporting the young adults to:

- Work together in an integrated way
- Offer support to identify and coordinate personal networks



## Young Adult

Aged between 18-25, with care leaver status (making them eligible for a Personal Advisor) and serving a sentence in a prison engaging with Always Hope



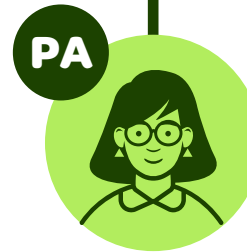
## Prison Offender Manager

Responsible for building effective, appropriate and supportive relationships with young adults in prison, with the aim of reducing reoffending. POMs complete OASys assessments with the young adult during sentence planning



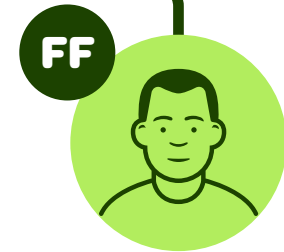
## Probation Practitioner

Responsible for enabling public protection, safeguarding and supporting a reduction in reoffending, by promoting change and positive outcomes for individuals. PPs complete the Pre sentence reports, OASys assessments during resettlement planning and Parole Reports



## Personal Advisor (local authority)

Responsible for supporting the young adult to develop life skills which will help them progress and achieve their aspirations. PAs keep in touch with the young adults through regular in-person visits (at least every 8-12 weeks), and are responsible for updating the young adult's Pathway Plan whenever there is a significant change in circumstances (at least every 6 months)



## Family Finder Service coordinator

Responsible for supporting young adults to identify people in their lives that they would like to bring together to provide them with coordinated support whilst they're in prison and on release. This could be through LifeLong Links or a Family Group Conference service. Further Information about LifeLong Links can be found on the [Family Rights Group](#) website

## What is Integrated Planning and Assessment support?

IPAA is a process whereby the staff from different services tasked with supporting the same young adult come together to share information and jointly offer support.

This process involves a planning meeting of the staff to agree how they will work together. This is followed by an integrated assessment meeting with the young adult which focuses on his strengths, vulnerabilities, risks and assets.

During the integrated assessment meeting a combined assessment tool is used. The tool contains all the questions to fulfil all practitioner's statutory reporting requirements (OASys/Pathway Plans) and avoids the young adult having to tell his story several times.

As well as filling out the Combined Assessment, the meeting is also a space for the young adult to ask questions, talk freely about what they want and need, and be involved in the plans developed to support him. By the end of the meeting there will be clarity from the young adult on what support he can expect to receive from each staff member.

## What is support to build personal networks?

While in prison, the young adults are offered the opportunity to identify people in their lives that they would like to bring together to provide them with coordinated support.

The aim of this is to ensure that they have an enduring, positive support network that they can turn to, in prison and on release.

With the support of a specialist, those people identified are contacted and then a group conference is held. In the meeting the young adult and his network make a plan for his future, with particular focus on how he can be supported to desist from offending and integrate back into the community.

If the local authority responsible for the young adult has a Lifelong Links service, they may be able to provide a specialist Lifelong Links coordinator to do this work. Where this service is not available the local authority may be able to support through their Family Group Conference (FGC) service.

Family Group Conferencing differs from Lifelong Links in that FGC coordinators do not search out people the young adult no longer has contact with, they just work with the young adult's current network.

# Always Hope at a Glance



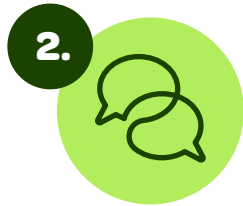
## Identification

A young adult serving a prison sentence discloses their care-leaver status to someone in the prison or probation service

Or a care-leaver's Personal Advisor (PA) discovers the young adult they support has gone to prison

### Note:

They could disclose their care experience to someone else, in which case, the practitioners named above should be informed.



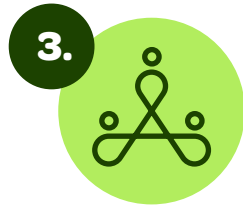
## Making Contact

The relevant practitioner contacts the young adult to:

- Tell them about Always Hope
- Gain consent to contact the other practitioners working with the young adult

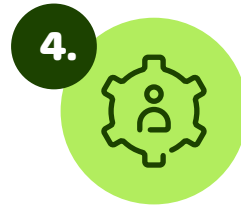
### Note:

Who the relevant practitioner is will depend on the timing of identification and the length of sentence.



## Forming a Team

With the young adult's consent, their Prison Offender Manager (POM), PA and Probation Practitioner (PP) get in contact with each other and form a team around the young adult. They pool their knowledge of the young adult and agree a plan for when they come together with them.



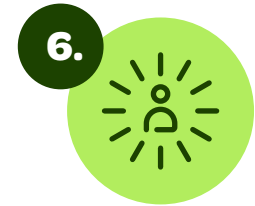
## Integrated Support in Custody

The young adult receives integrated support from prison, and local authority practitioners until resettlement planning begins. The PP will join the team to lead on integrated resettlement planning. This includes the practitioners working together with the young adult to develop one plan for their future. The young adult strengthens their personal support network through participating in a service such as LifeLong Links or a FGC.



## Integrated Plans

Plans for the young adult's sentence (long sentences only) and resettlement (all sentences) are developed with the team around the young adult with a clear lines of accountability for which practitioner is responsible for different elements of the plan, for example ensuring the young adult has an appropriate place to live on release.



## Integrated Support in the Community

The young adult's PP and PA coordinate their work to support the young adult in fulfilling their resettlement plan. Their personal support network will play a key role in helping them complete their community sentence.

# What will it feel like to work in this way?

“

*It gave a good insight to ... what support services they can offer, **how we can actually work together...** I definitely would feel comfortable working with every single person that was in the room*

Prison

”

“

*It really **benefited them** to see physically all three of us there and telling them what the process was and reiterating that that kind of support network was there*

Probation

”

“

*It's **strengthened my view on the importance of relationships**, and also the message that we give to the service and to PAs that once, when people go into custody, they're not to be forgotten, you know they still need support*

LA Manager

”

“

*Coming together as a team to support this young man as he prepares for his release has given us all a much better chance to support him with what he needs, as we can keep him and each other up to date on his progress. I look forward to working with all of them together in the future*

Probation

”

“

*I can sort of help and encourage them to remember that **things can be good and have been good and could potentially be good again***

Lifelong Links Coordinator  
Young Adult

”

“

*X (the PA) will always reassure me about that support. **So basically, everyone is chipping in and I'll take it all...** I know I'm going to get a call off 'Y' (LL Coordinator) when I'm out*

Young Adult

”

“

***I definitely advocate for those in custody more...** It's given me a bit of a passion for it really*

Personal Advisor

”



# Top Tips for building relationships with young adults

We have collected some tips from piloting Always Hope that may help young adults feel included and support them to be comfortable sharing their story:

## In the Planning Meeting (professionals only)

Come prepared to share what you know of the young adult.

Consider the young adult's current situation - How are they feeling right now, what are their immediate needs, who is in their life right now to support them, both in a professional and personal capacity.

Consider the young adult's journey through both the care and criminal justice systems, including any impact of trauma, with other professionals so they are all aware of their history. Have there been periods where they have been stable? What was their life like at that time and how can we get them back there? Are there professionals or others in their lives that they trust?

Discuss what the young adult is like, their hopes and ambitions, what they will need in order to achieve these ambitions and what challenges might get in the way.

Ensure the meetings with the young adult are arranged and held at the appropriate time frame, (e.g. POM/COM handover 6 months before release). Don't be afraid to challenge other professionals if this isn't happening - it makes things easier for everyone, not just the young adult, when statutory time frames are met.

## In the Integrated Meeting with the young adult

Introductions - Clearly explain who you are, and what your role is (including the young adult) when meeting the young adult for the first time. Allow them to introduce themselves also. Align yourselves as a team of practitioners there to support the young adult, being mindful of the use of language, avoiding jargon and pitch the conversation according to the young adult's maturity levels.

Create space in the meetings, through the environment, agendas and the way questions are asked, so that the young adult feels able to talk about what they want and need, and the plans developed takes account of the young adult's strengths, needs and vulnerabilities, as well as their risks.

Find out what the young adult is good at and what they enjoy doing then include these as goals that they and the team can work towards.

Allow them the space to ask questions/ disclose information after the arranged meetings - make sure they are aware of this possibility and how to do so if they need to.



## Outcomes for young adults

Reduced reoffending and increased chances of rehabilitation and a positive future for young adults with experience of care and custody.

Greater levels of comfort disclosing care experience and future plans to practitioners in the prison and probation services.

Increased clarity from young adults on what support they can receive and how to access it.

## Enabling activities

Young adults meet all the practitioners tasked with supporting them, have the opportunity to build a relationship and understand their roles before any plans are created.

Materials detailing the support available to care experienced young adults is up to date and readily available.

Practitioners clarify what support each one can offer and how the young adults can request support.

Conversations about a young adult's future have them at the centre, ensuring they feel they are listened to, respected and included.





## Outcomes for practitioners - Learning and Development

Greater consideration and understanding from practitioners and services of the experiences of care experienced young adults in the justice system.

Greater awareness amongst practitioners in different services of each others' roles and responsibilities.

## Enabling activities

Learning time is given for practitioners to attend training, and they are encouraged to attend.

Resources are provided and shared around services so that all practitioners are aware of their existence.

## Outcomes for practitioners - Practice

Improved processes for identifying care experienced people when they come into custody.

Greater connectivity and alignment from young adult's personal and professional support networks, including coordinated statutory assessment and planning processes.

Improved recording of care experienced young adult's whereabouts on services' databases.

## Enabling activities

Contact sheets for prison, probation and leaving care teams are created and updated regularly. Everyone knows about the existence of these directories.

Time in team meetings is taken to check in on the progress of each care experienced young adult, opportunities to raise challenges and successes are given.

Practitioners across services share information about young adults as soon as they become aware that they are a care leaver/in the justice system.

Staff are held accountable for updating spreadsheets and noting what support each young adult has received.

Data sharing agreements between all services, accompanied by informed consent from young adults are held and shared.



# The detail: Links to appendix

## 1. Step-by-step guides to Integrated Planning and Assessment

### Identification, first contact and sign-up

- The Personal Advisor's Role
- The Prison Offender Manager's Role
- The Probation Practitioner's Role

### Integrated Planning and Assessment

- For young adults serving short sentences
- For young adults serving long sentences
- In the community

## 2. Practice Guidance

- Integrated Planning Meeting
- Agenda: Short Sentences
- Agenda: Long Sentences
- Agenda: In the Community
- Agenda: Integrated Assessment
- Agenda: Integrated Final Review

## 3. Supporting tools

### Communication

- Template Communications between service providers
- Team Contact Form

### Working together

- Team Actions List

### Integrated Planning and Assessment

- Combined Assessment Form

## 4. Building support networks

## 5. Useful information

- Useful Vocabulary

Always Hope is led by Innovation Unit in partnership with Her Majesty's Prison Service, the National Probation Service, Birmingham, Coventry and Wolverhampton leaving care services, Family Rights Group, Prison Reform Trust, Catch-22 National Care Leavers Benchmarking Forum, Care Leavers Association and Barnardos.

The Always Hope model was piloted in the West Midlands with young men serving prison sentence in HMP Brinsford and HMP Swinfen Hall from November 2022 - June 2023.

### Funded by:



### Led by:



To find out more visit [Innovation Unit](#) or email [jessie.ben-ami@innovationunit.org](mailto:jessie.ben-ami@innovationunit.org)