

# EVALUATION OF THE PEMBROKESHIRE YOUTH JUSTICE TEAM

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report outlines key findings and recommendations of an evaluation of the Pembrokeshire Youth Justice Team in Wales, UK. The evaluation, which was funded by the Youth Justice Board in Wales (YJB Cymru), was conducted by researchers from the University of Southampton and Swansea. The objective was to pilot a Youth Justice Evaluation Inventory that was designed in collaboration with YJB Cymru and in line with the Youth Justice Strategy for Wales which was published in 2014 by the Youth Justice Board and the Welsh Government.

## THE PEMBROKESHIRE YOUTH JUSTICE TEAM

The Team is one of several multi-agency Youth Offending Teams which were created by the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 of England and Wales. The Act also established the Youth Justice Board to support the work of Youth Offending Teams. The fundamental role of every Youth Offending Team is the same; to reduce offending by children and young people, and to oversee the coordinated delivery of services to young people, particularly those who are in trouble with the law. Each Team has a statutory constitution that necessitates collaboration with other services. These services include social work, probation, police, education, healthcare and other services.

In Wales specifically, Youth Offending Teams have to work collaboratively with services (such as education and healthcare services) that are subject to devolved policy which includes a commitment to ensuring that children receive their rights and entitlements in line with relevant Articles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Consequently, Youth Offending Teams have to uphold several rights-based principles enshrined in the Youth Justice Board (YJB) and Welsh Government (WG)'s Children and Young People First, Offenders Second (CFOS) policy<sup>1</sup>. This child-centred policy also underpins the stated values and aspirations of the wider YJB for England and Wales and it is embedded in the 'child-centered' strategic plan for youth Justice<sup>2</sup>. In Wales, the CFOS policy places responsibilities on practitioners to safeguard the rights of children and young people who are supervised by Youth Offending Teams.

In their evaluation of the Pembrokeshire Youth Justice Team in Wales, researchers from the University of Southampton and Swansea University assessed whether the Team's practices are consistent with the CFOS policy. A Youth Justice Evaluation Inventory co-designed with practice development officials at YJB Cymru, and incorporating questions about practitioners' awareness of, and commitment to children's rights was used for the evaluation which also explored the extent to which evidence-based skills and practices were employed by the Team. The skills and practices include:

- using research-informed skills to work with children and young people;
- assessing children and young people's needs, strengths, and protective factors;
- integrating assessment outcomes into interventions;
- using quality assurance strategies to maintain high standards of practice;
- providing appropriate staff training and professional development opportunities; and
- maintaining high levels of staff satisfaction.

The Pembrokeshire Youth Justice Team should be congratulated for the many examples of best practice identified in this evaluation and these are outlined in the summary of findings below.

The research team would like to extend their thanks to Steve Davis, Youth Service Manager, and Kerri Parr, Operational Manager (Youth Justice Team), for making this evaluation possible and for the time they invested in the process. Our thanks also go to Lynzi Jarman, Director of Innovation and Engagement in Wales, Youth Justice Board, Wales (YJB Cymru) and Dr Susan Thomas, Head of Oversight and Support, YJB Cymru. We also thank Gareth Giles at Public Policy|University of Southampton for his work in designing this Executive Summary. Finally, we thank all the staff and managers who participated in the evaluation and were so generous with their time.

# SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

This section of the report highlights best practice observed during the evaluation of the Pembrokeshire Youth Justice Team. The results have been divided into two main sections 'Part A Practice Principles' and 'Part B Organisational/Service Level Principles'. Part A sets out the findings of the evaluation in relation to the Team's compliance with relevant UNCRC Articles and the quality of assessment practice. Part B presents the findings relating to organisational/service-level principles of practice. These focus on the suitability of practice evaluation strategies, professional development opportunities, and staff's assessment of the service (including levels of staff satisfaction).

## PART A: PRACTICE PRINCIPLES



### PRACTICE ETHOS: COMPLIANCE WITH UNCRC PRINCIPLES

The dominant practice culture within the Pembrokeshire Youth Justice Team reflects key elements of the Youth Justice Board and Welsh Government (YJB/WG) joint youth justice strategy which sets out projected practice outcomes that should reflect the UNCRC provisions pertaining to justice systems. The outcomes are set out below alongside the Team's performance in relation to each of them.

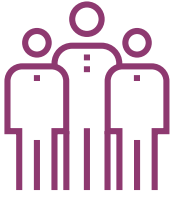
**A well-designed partnership approach:** The Pembrokeshire Youth Justice Team has in place, formal partnerships and service-level agreements with external organisations that offer children and young people relevant support. Examples include housing, education and training, substance misuse, leisure and healthcare services.

**Early intervention, prevention and diversion:** The Team is committed to diverting young people away from the formal youth justice system. A large proportion of the service's workload involves prevention/pre-court cases.

**Reducing reoffending:** The Team recognizes the vulnerability of children and young people, and diverts them to relevant services.

**Effective use of custody (custody should be used as a last resort):** The Team strives to prevent young people's entry into custodial institutions and practitioners are committed to the belief that custody should be used as a last resort.

**Reintegration and resettlement at the end of a sentence:** The Team provides opportunities for young people to engage in restorative practices, such as reparative work within the community and restorative work with victims in the form of apology letters. A Restorative Justice Officer facilitates these restorative interventions.



## ASSESSMENT SKILLS

Effective assessments are vital for identifying and responding to children and young people's needs and strengths.

- The Pembrokeshire Youth Justice Team recognizes that effective assessments should be undertaken, and assessment outcomes should inform service delivery. It has processes in place for ensuring that these requirements are implemented in practice.
- Young people are assessed to identify needs, strengths, and protective factors that can encourage desistance from offending and improve their lives.
- Assessments are undertaken periodically, and the outcomes inform intervention plans.
- Young people participate in assessment processes and decisions. This is a positive approach as it promotes collaborative supervision which can encourage compliance, engagement and longer-term positive change.
- The introduction of AssetPlus seems to have been met with some resistance from some practitioners. The consensus is that AssetPlus assessments are time consuming and can impinge on the amount of time available for building meaningful relationships with young people.

# PART B:

## ORGANISATIONAL/SERVICE-LEVEL PRINCIPLES



### SUITABILITY OF PRACTICE EVALUATION STRATEGIES

Key quality assurance strategies that can improve practice include internal and external evaluation strategies.

The Pembrokeshire Youth Justice Team has internal quality assurance mechanisms in place. For example, the Operational Manager regularly reviews AssetPlus assessments, court reports, and other relevant practice document to assess their quality and consistency. Results are then fed back to the practitioners, and this process helps to maintain good standards of practice



### PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

The YJB/WG (2014) CFOS strategy highlights the importance of adequate staff competencies and the importance of staff training and continuing professional development.

- The Pembrokeshire Youth Justice Team’s commitment to professional development is one of its key strengths, and the Service Manager is supportive of staff training and development.
- Members of management and practitioners possess requisite educational qualifications and experience



### STAFF SATISFACTION

Organisational harmony within a service can improve the nature and outcomes of service delivery. Organisational harmony manifests as staff cohesion and satisfaction, a collaborative culture, effective communication channels, and conflict resolution strategies.

- There is organisational harmony within the Pembrokeshire Youth Justice Team. Staff are supportive of each other and there are adequate channels of communication and appropriate mechanisms in place for resolving staff disputes.
- Staff satisfaction is at a high level and staff also feel supported by members of management.
- Members of management have confidence in the staff members’ professional judgement and staff are encouraged to be creative when working with young people.
- Some staff members are however, concerned about potential staff redundancies due to budget cuts but budget cuts are beyond the control of the Pembrokeshire Youth Justice Service.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations will help address some of the areas for improvement identified by the evaluators and maintain high standards of service delivery.



**Research-Informed Practice skills:** To ensure that evidence-based practice skills are embedded in practice, practitioners should have the opportunity to conduct self-evaluations, and where possible, peer evaluations. These evaluations should involve comparing practice skills with the skills that have been shown by a large body of research, to help produce positive outcomes for children and young people.

**Digital checklist:** self evaluations and peer evaluations can be conducted using a user-friendly digitised evaluation checklist (see Appendix 1). The checklist comprises research-informed skills and it has been designed by researchers from the University of Southampton and Swansea University. This can complement other evaluation methodologies such as the YJB's peer review programme and the HMIP's use of peer inspectors.



**Assessment Practice:** The Youth Justice Board for England and Wales could institute procedures for simplifying AssetPlus assessments to make them less time intensive and should offer youth justice staff access to regular training on how to use the tool. It is worth noting that the YJB is currently doing some work on assessment including an evaluation of Asset+ which will inform future direction.



**Practice Evaluation Strategies:** The Youth Justice Team would benefit from conducting periodic reviews of the effective practice literature from academic peer reviewed criminological and psychological journals (these should examine both the theory and practice of evidence-based practices). Findings from such literature reviews could usefully inform service delivery.



**Staff Satisfaction:** There is overall staff satisfaction, however, some staff feel that where appropriate, they would welcome a degree of consultation before changes in staffing roles are made, and also regarding potential staff redundancies. Adequate levels of staff consultation will help maintain the positive staff morale currently existing in the Team, and bolster the Team's collaborative culture

In sum, the Pembrokeshire Youth Justice Team delivers high quality services that are consistent with aspects of the research evidence on effective practice and relevant UNCRC provisions.

## References

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