

Risk assessments for care leavers in custody

Supporting care leavers (aged 16-25 years) who are in or at risk of entering the criminal justice system by reconnecting them to their statutory support in police custody.

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Key details

Stage of practice	Untested
Purpose	Diversion
Topic	Public Protection, Safeguarding & Vulnerability Criminal justice Custody
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Region	West Midlands
Partners	Police Local authority Voluntary/not for profit organisation
Stage of implementation	The practice is implemented.
Start date	May 2021

Key details

Scale of initiative	Local
Target group	Adults Children and young people

Aim

The aim is to:

- identify care leavers entering or at risk of entering the criminal justice system
- provide multi-agency support to care leavers
- work with local authorities to explore opportunities and additional support for diversion
- support custody staff to manage detainees' safety in custody by considering potential childhood trauma

Intended outcome

The intended outcomes are to:

- reduce number of care leavers re-entering the criminal justice system
- improve support pathways for care leavers
- improve care leavers' trust and confidence in the police

Description

West Midlands Police (WMP) identified that care leavers (aged 16-25) in the criminal justice system may need more support to help their transition to adulthood. To support care leavers who enter or at risk of entering the criminal justice system, WMP have outlined a support programme with the aim of removing triggers for offending.

Changes to custody risk assessments

All persons who enter police custody are subject to a thorough risk assessment to enable custody staff to develop a care plan to manage that individual's care. The information is utilised to build a care plan, and support requirements. This risk assessment is built into WMP's custody system 'Connect'. The risk assessment covers:

- physical health
- injuries
- mental health
- substance/alcohol use including dependence
- learning disability
- neurodiversity
- additional considerations for female and children
- religious requirements
- medication

The risk assessment is informed by the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 (PACE) codes of practice and authorised professional practice (APP). The form was designed by custody staff, with additional inputs from multi-agency partners, lived experience individuals and recommendations from other forces.

WMP criminal justice services changed the custody risk assessment to include identification of care leavers that are arrested or voluntary interviewed. The additional questions include a hyperlink to a document with a QR code and details about the care leavers covenant. There is an offline manual version of the risk assessment which is utilised by custody staff during period of system downtime. Once any downtime has been concluded the information is transferred into the system, which triggers any referrals that were previously missed.

Referral

A referral can be made if a care leaver provides their consent or there are grounds for public interest regarding concerns for exploitation or safeguarding. The referral includes the persons full details, with contact number/email, the location of their detention, the reason for their arrest, and the relevant risk assessment questions. The referral process is integrated into the risk assessment and is fully automated. Custody staff select the local authority from a list, and the custody system automatically sends a real time notification to the local authority. The local authority then forward it

to the individual's personal adviser so that contact can be made. This contact is usually post-release, however as the referral is made on entering the custody suite, contact details for that custody suite are included to allow prompt contact. The Care Leavers Covenant, a national inclusion programme, picks up referrals for individuals who were not looked after by one of the seven local authorities to connect them with the correct authority.

Bags

When a child is taken into care, they often leave with their belongings in a bin bag. WMP have been provided with donated bags from Madlug by the Care Leavers Covenant. Care leavers who come into custody are entitled to a free bag when they leave to put all their property in to prevent re-trauma.

Awareness

During care leavers week, the force invited the Covenant to one of their custody suites to speak with care leavers. The communications department also publicised care leavers week on social media platforms to raise awareness.

Recruitment

WMP recruitment team asked officers and staff involved in supporting care leavers if they would like to share their experiences on the website and during future recruitment processes.

Cost

There was no cost involved, as Connect has the ability to build in automated referrals and the force internally have control of what is recorded in the risk assessments.

Overall impact

- since the beginning of 2024, over 2000 care leavers have entered WMP custody blocks. 850 of those have requested additional support through the risk assessment form
- throughout 2024, Spectra (an organisation that delivers the national care leavers covenant) has trained over 200 WMP officers and staff encouraging them to understand the challenges of being a care leaver and the importance of early diversion

The following feedback has been provided:

"We had a notification for one person which then prompted us to contact his family and we were then able to get more information about their current situation and begin a referral to our housing team in advance of a release from custody, this meant less waiting around for the young person and temporary accommodation being identified more quickly for them."

"Coventry Through Care service are using the referrals to inform group supervision and the wider work taking place to support care leavers within the criminal justice system."

Learning

- when conducting the risk assessment, it is essential that custody staff select the relevant local authority to prevent inefficiencies and additional costs. WMP have provided briefing to all custody staff outlining the jurisdiction of each of the seven local authorities
- some local authorities are more receptive to the initiative than others. This has been fed back to the Care Leavers Covenant who have worked with local authorities to ensure that referrals are appropriately managed

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