

Building Relationships with Young People in Oberstown to Improve Pro-social Outcomes

Centre for Effective Services, January 2016

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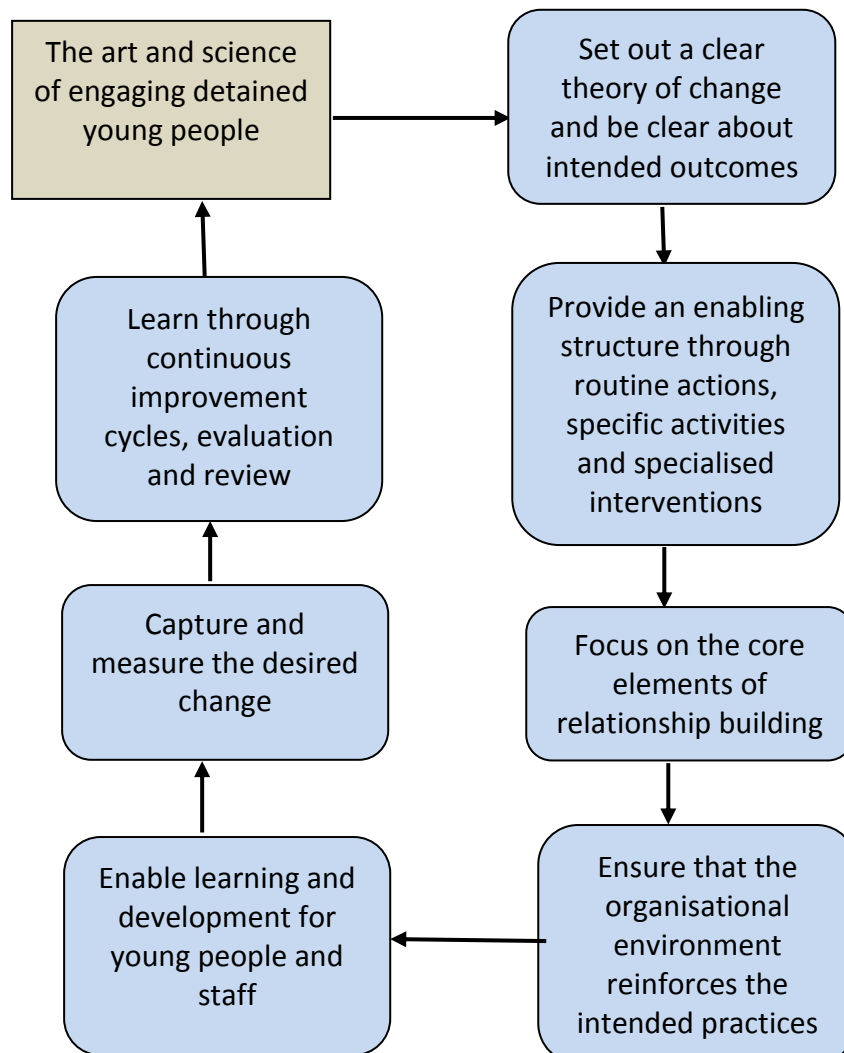
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SECTION ONE

Introduction

Since late 2014, the Centre for Effective Services has been working with the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, and the Oberstown Children Detention Campus (Oberstown), on a project to identify ways of building effective relationships between staff and young people in detention. The work involved a review of the research literature as the first of four inter-linked but discrete stages. The literature review will be publicly available as a stand-alone document from the [Centre for Effective Services](#). Stage 1 resulted in the following conceptual model of the elements involved in routine relationship building (Figure 1), which is now recommended for adoption as the Oberstown model.

Figure 1: Conceptual elements of routine relationship building



The second stage developed the findings into a general 'Theory of Change', specifying how evidence-informed interventions can be linked to improved self-governance, and in particular to attitude and behaviour management outcomes (see Appendix 1). The literature search in stage 1 also surfaced a wide range of useful materials that were of potential value to Oberstown. These have been captured in a user-friendly 'Route Map to Resources' (Appendix 2), also available from the [Centre for Effective Services](#).

As intended when the work was commissioned, stages 1 and 2 were *normative* in considering what *could* happen based on the international evidence and in light of the resources available at Oberstown. The idea was to set out an ideal without reference to current practice. Despite the generally pessimistic prognosis about working with such young people, and the many challenges in this kind of work, it was understood from the outset that Oberstown has a responsibility to provide the best possible standard of care. In a situation where there is a lack of conclusive or at least readily available evidence about ways of working that are most likely to lead to pro-social outcomes, the aim was to develop an evidence-informed and more hopeful way forward for Oberstown.

In stage 3, the findings thus far were presented to 70 teaching and care staff, and their responses were captured in note form and returned to participants for accuracy. Analysis of the responses highlighted a number of key themes, which all parties wished to explore further through an online survey. Over a period of three weeks in August, the survey was open to all staff (26 teachers, 38 Night Supervising Officers, and 116 Residential Social Care Workers) although many staff were away due to holidays, and other reasons. There were 36 returns representing all three groups. The results informed questions for 6 individual interviews with staff at Oberstown. The interview responses helped to create ten action statements which were to be considered by four staff focus groups for validity (see Appendix 3). Due to circumstances, however, only one staff focus group ran. A separate Technical Report contains information about the methodology for the short literature review, the online survey and the individual interviews, as well as the results from these activities.

This report is stage 4, which combines the findings from the first three stages about engaging detained young people in ways that can be linked to improved self-governance outcomes on their release. While such improvements may only be modest and marginal, this report shows how relationships between young people and staff formed in Oberstown can help young people to negotiate the risks and adversities they may face on return to their communities. The first section below presents the findings, and the second develops these into seven evidence-based steps to improve relationship building based on the conceptual model established in stage 1. The approach is about reflective practices, as opposed to tying Oberstown to a particular programme or set of interventions which experience has shown, can become defunct or de-bunked.

NB For ease of reading, citations are not included in this report. They are referenced in full in the literature review.

The Place and Potential of Routine Relationship Building

The literature review suggests that **routine relationship building is about engaging detained young people in purposeful activity** on three inter-related levels.

- **Level 1** involves relatively informal yet still constructive face to face interactions, for example during meal times, between staff and young people.
- **Level 2** involves young people and staff participating together in specific, planned and structured activities involving, for example, arts or sport. As well as equipping young people with knowledge and skills, level 2 activities provide opportunities for interactions that facilitate positive communication between staff and young people and between young people.
- **Level 3** consists of participation in more specialised interventions, for example specific therapeutic approaches or off-the-peg evidence-based programmes.

Routine means 'as usual', while also referring to the daily round of activities. The implication is that the approach is firmly embedded in the way that staff work with young people, and consistently supported and reinforced by management.

At all three levels, it is vital that staff model self-control, good communication skills, and effective learning behaviours. Crucially, all levels are significantly influenced by the prevailing norms in the wider organisational context. Here ethos, such as the general way in which young people are viewed, is as important as the procedures, rules, regulations, and daily schedules governing the behaviour of all staff and young people.

Oberstown staff agree with the over-riding importance of ethos and of the necessity to act as role models. This understanding was articulated clearly in the following comment:

*Young people need to understand that you have a job to do, that we are there to be friendly not friends, that there is a reason for what we are doing. They need to know that you are working with them from a particular point of view, which is about their potential rather than their misdeeds. This relates back to day one, when we should be trying to dismantle the way of seeing things and themselves that they came with. We have to reduce the power of 'them' and 'us'.
(Participant 1)*

The short review of the literature, suggests that there is an art and a science to routine relationship building. The science comes from attention to research and other forms of evidence gathering, including consultation and learning from practice. Innovation and implementation take knowledge, time and effort. The art involves commitment, enthusiasm, and perseverance in the face of difficulties, courage in engaging in challenging but purposeful conversations, a willingness to be flexible, and the capacity to come up with creative solutions to what often appear to be intractable problems. In this sense, **relationship building is best seen as a craft which needs to be taught, modelled and cultivated** as opposed to something which can be required through procedures or simply acquired by following a manual of instructions.

The evidence from the research suggests that effective routine relationship building can result in measurable improvements in outcome areas that contribute to pro-social self-governance. The outcome areas include:

- Communication skills
- Confidence and agency
- Planning and problem solving
- Relationships
- Creativity and imagination
- Self-control
- Health and well-being

It is important to note, however, that beneficial outcomes may not be sustained in the long-term if treatment is inconsistent, fragmented or brief. What can be achieved is also significantly constrained by the fact that Oberstown has little if any control over what happens to and with young people prior to their arrival, and again when they leave. **The focus of this final report, therefore, is firmly on the potential for gain for young people during their stay at Oberstown.** As such, it articulates the specific contribution that Oberstown can make to outcomes for children and young people in the context of the Government's over-arching national framework [Better Outcomes Brighter Futures](#).

Three inter-related levels of activity

Level 1: Constructive interactions

While effective interventions are not highly context dependent, those which are implemented with high quality and embody a 'therapeutic' philosophy, such as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, mentoring, counselling or skills training, are reported to be more effective than those based on strategies of control or coercion (e.g. surveillance, deterrence, discipline). In this case, **establishing and maintaining consistent and positive relationships between staff and young people is critical in improving young people's ability to manage their own behaviour.** This is particularly important in relation to threatening and aggressive behaviour, which can lead to violence and injuries. As one interviewee argued:

It is the relationship with young people that keeps you safe. (Participant 4)

Staff report that building consistency in relationships can be undermined by the comings and goings of young people, the mix of remand and committal sentences with their different expectations, needs, and duration of stay, and the frequent movement of staff between units. As two interviewees succinctly stated:

We can establish safe and secure routines here but currently it is difficult, as faces and group dynamics are changing all the time. (Participant 2)

There is an inconsistent approach to staffing – staffing by numbers – staff are not matched to relationships. Beds dictate where the young people go, not the dynamics or what would work best for the group. (Participant 3)

Notwithstanding the point about consistency, it is also clear from the literature and from the staff that **any contact with staff can be a potential change point for young people**. Two major provisos apply here. One is that all staff need to be aware of, ready and able to exploit any opportunities for positive change, and the other is that learning and development also requires active participation by the young people. Indeed, when young people are coerced, any programme or intervention can only achieve limited success. In this case, it is important to appreciate that even when interventions are delivered in a secure setting, young people still possess the agency to purposefully engage, creatively comply or to passively rebel. At a surface level the outward signs to all three responses may be very similar.

A key message from the literature, therefore, is that **young people who experience mentoring interventions that are characterised by frequent interactions, sustained relationships and sufficiently trained mentors, exhibit improved attitudes and behaviours when compared to other groups**. Although this is a specific reference to mentoring, the underlying points apply to anyone attempting to facilitate in young people an increase in protective factors such as commitment to education, self-esteem, social competence, decision making, and a greater knowledge of the harmful effects of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs.

Oberstown staff agree about the need for consistent levels of high quality staff engagement with young people. As one stated:

There are differing levels of tolerance among staff – some days they take a more strict approach, while other days they are laissez-faire. It is important that they operate as a team. The needs of young people aren't necessarily taken into account. (Participant 3)

The following comment, however, expresses a common view about often being on the back foot:

With no underlying structure to our work we tend to react. [...] It's like having a Box of IKEA furniture without the instructions. (Participant 1)

In this situation, it is important to appreciate the role of activities and programmes in providing a necessary structure.

Level 2: Activities and Programmes

In addition to the benefits of detained young people being involved in formal education and continuing their schooling, it is widely acknowledged in the literature and by the staff that **complementary leisure, informal learning and other structured activities are good for social and emotional development**. As one member of staff explained:

The goal is to make sure the young people eat properly, exercise, and are encouraged to participate in programmes and are supported in their education. We need to be talking to young people about what can be achieved, and hope. (Participant 2)

The arts afford youth a chance to learn new skills while keeping them physically and mentally occupied in a constructive way. Participation in arts-based activities can also provide a means through which to communicate feelings and ideas, as well as opportunities to exercise decision-making and take ownership and responsibility.

Meaningful dialogue between groups of young people and encouragement for them to reflect on and evaluate their own situations (through arts-based and informal activities such as playing board games and cooking together) can help to transform what limits their potential and empower them to reclaim ownership of their lives. Other positive outcomes from arts-based interventions (e.g. music making) are said to include: improved confidence, self-esteem, self-concept, education/work performance, interpersonal relationships, social skills, health and mental wellbeing. With so much potential it is imperative that staff have the time and the resources to focus effort on such activities, as acknowledged in the following comment:

Staff motivation is the care/education model, but resourcing doesn't back that (e.g. having enough resources to get a young person out of their room). 3-4 hours education is low. It would be good to have night classes in tiling, woodwork, arts, drama. (Participant 2)

It would appear from staff responses that **activities with a practical focus are more likely to be successful with the young people**. In particular, outdoor pursuits was seen to be most effective but now used insufficiently.

The point is that creative programmes and informal learning opportunities can be powerful in the construction of a 'creative self' or 'productive self' for young people that is distinct from their 'role' as a juvenile offender. As one member of staff explained:

The important thing is to think about an alternative narrative for the young people. They should not be seen by others or see themselves as a criminal underclass. The focus should be on their capacity to get a job and work, and about education. Staff can be role models for that and start talking to them about potential careers. (Participant 1)

The value of young people being able to display an end-product from creative effort (e.g. a CD) should also not be underestimated in an environment where self-worth and other achievements are low. Sports-based interventions are also beneficial and can help participants focus their thoughts and energies, break the monotony of the regime and alleviate boredom, provide a sense of achievement and promote self-esteem, self-efficacy and confidence. Engagement in team sports can also help young people develop social skills such as listening, collaborating and working together.

Level 3: Specialised Interventions

Therapeutic Approaches

If the main part of the work in detention centres is about engaging young people in school and other non-formal learning activities, sometimes there is a need for more intense

therapeutic approaches. These are aimed at reducing the incidence of aggression and/or need to use restraint by improving staff understanding of a young person's behaviour that, in turn, improves the relationships between both. The research indicates that **challenging behaviour and difficult situations in detention centres requires an increase in positive behaviours from staff**, as well as increased exposure to learning opportunities which are a good fit for the young person.

However, it is widely recognised in the literature and by staff that undertaking any type of developmental work is difficult in situations where safety and security are of paramount concern, and cannot be compromised for any type of intervention or programme. At the same time, the success of developmental work is likely to be in proportion to the amount of time available. Staff behaviour in such situations is therefore crucial as it can reinforce or undermine all the positive effort.

This last point highlights the art and craft side of the work of staff in detention settings. Maintaining dignity and continuing to hope for better outcomes requires strength of character and perseverance in staff, especially after being directly involved in dealing with violent incidents. **Successfully implementing programmes is also determined by the level of staff knowledge and skills**. For example, all staff could be trained in the theoretical basis for a given model and have a basic understanding of trauma as this supports a trauma sensitive and aware culture.

Evidence-based programmes and approaches

Evidence-based programmes are ways of formalising and increasing attention to approaches that work. These programmes often meet specific needs and require regular training and monitoring for fidelity. While evidence-based programmes provide well designed opportunities for staff at Oberstown to introduce new ways of working with young people, the online survey of staff in Oberstown revealed little knowledge of such programmes.

At the same time, it is important to stress that non-evidence based programmes can also be effective if they are informed by an evidence based theory about the specific contribution made by a particular intervention. They also need to be used correctly, and implemented well. It can also often be difficult to demonstrate that a programme alone is responsible, even one that is said to be evidence-based, for any changes in practice and behaviour, separate from other institutional features, such as the calibre of staff.

The importance of milieu and the role of management

It is a common theme in the literature that any process of development is shaped by the interactions between the individual and their surroundings. For example, young people's perceptions of safety within the facility can impact on their antisocial activity and system involvement. This means that the overall regime within which staff and young people live and work together is of paramount importance, as **positive environments equals positive behaviours**. This point is supported by significant research indicating the importance of 'organisational climate' in securing better outcomes for children over and above the type of programme or intervention.

In this regard, from the staff survey and interviews it would appear that Oberstown staff are positive about creating the right environment if the required elements are in place. As one explained:

Safety and security can be reached quickly if the environment is right, with friendly, approachable staff. Young people will know staff will look out for them. They need to know staff are in control of the environment. (Participant 5)

The majority of survey respondents believe that care/education should be favoured over correction. This finding is consistent with the literature. Yet survey responses to open questions, and the individual interviews, also revealed a lack of consistency across Oberstown to the overall approach to working with young people. There is a concern that the tendency is towards correction because of insufficient resources fully to deliver a treatment/education model.

Notwithstanding inevitable concerns about resources, **it is imperative to resolve the widely acknowledged tension between custody and care**. This split has implications for the approach to the work with young people, with one tendency emphasising authority and another relationship building. According to the literature this split can be more responsible than any other single factor for the continuing failure of treatment. Getting an appropriate balance can create a supportive environment which has the potential to result in behavioural changes.

Legitimacy and procedural justice also lend themselves to the creation of a supportive environment. If the procedures through which authorities exercise their authority are perceived as fair and just, individuals are more likely to comply with the law/norms.

Management has responsibility for creating and maintaining a positive environment. This means that management needs to strive for high standards with employee involvement, and focus on care synonymous with the overall programme, not just a designated person with specific staff responsibilities. While staff are clear that management is ultimately responsible for ensuring that the work is of high quality, and for the necessary resources and guidance, staff recognise themselves as being central to providing a secure learning environment for young people. Even here, however, there is a need for consistent management input. As one explained:

Effective supervision hasn't taken place and managers are unaware of the realities of work on units. (Participant 2)

A common theme from the staff survey and the individual interviews is about the need for staff groups to be organised and supported by management to work together in a fully collaborative way. Another theme was about the need to follow through with existing procedures and procedures such as holding regular meetings to discuss the progress and needs of the young people. Putting the two together strongly suggests the importance of closer alignment between staff and management practices.

Staff Development

The literature emphasises the importance of skilled staff, which in turn highlights the need to build skills and capacity through ongoing staff training. This can be of a general nature or focused on specific issues, e.g. dealing with aggression. Training needs to be supplemented by other methods which could include formally and informally sharing experience, knowledge, resources, and tools on a regular basis. Systematic support for staff is also critical, and is typically provided through mentoring, coaching, peer review processes, and supervision. This latter development meets the 'craft' requirements of mastering relationship-building as a competence. A consistent message from Oberstown staff, however, was about the lack of time for learning and development, and in particular for purposeful reflection on their work.

Outcomes linked to pro-social behaviour

It is widely accepted that simplistic narrow approaches will not treat the complex problems of young people. A multi-modal approach which addresses problems in behaviour, emotions and thinking is therefore required. **Cognitive behavioural treatments (e.g. thinking skills programmes, social skills and problem solving approaches) have been found to show larger effects than other types of programmes**, while deterrence and supervision based programmes (e.g. boot camps) can result in slightly increased recidivism rates, i.e. worse than nothing.

Research has shown that **most treatment gains for detained youth occur within the first 6 months**, after which the gains are maintained but with little evidence of additional progress. The research indicates that a programme's impact on the reconviction rates of offenders depends on whether the offender actually completes the programme. Positive relationships between youth and staff members can also affect outcomes as pro-social bonds work to give people a reason to work to control themselves.

The survey findings suggest that communication and relationship skills are viewed by staff as being the most important, with those related to health and well-being, and creativity being the least important. As noted above, the literature is more positive about the development of creative capacities amongst young people. Self-awareness was also highlighted in the survey findings as important, as were practical skills such as cooking and budgeting. In no particular order, Table 1 below shows types of outcomes relevant to the Oberstown setting. This could be developed into an outcomes framework which expresses what can be expected from positive relationship building.

Measuring Outcomes

While there is general agreement about the importance of so called 'soft' outcomes, measuring such outcomes can be difficult. It is necessary to have a comprehensive high level outcomes framework for young people, staff and the institution, that includes short or 'proximal' outcomes (involving knowledge, skills, attitudes, behaviour and personal circumstances) and medium to longer term or 'distal' outcomes (e.g. better engagement with education or training, reduction in offending behaviours). Establishing such a framework can be helpful but other issues would need to be addressed in Oberstown, as survey and interview responses point to inconsistencies with regard to **recording and**

therefore problems in terms of identifying progress and achievement. The following comment captures this point precisely:

It would be ok if they roar and shout but in the end go where they are supposed to go. But progress and achievements are not recorded anywhere. (Participant 4)

More specifically, survey responses indicate that ‘before and after’ assessment, independent evaluation by researchers, self-evaluation by young people, and creative approaches, are the measures of young people’s progress that are least likely to be used at Oberstown. There was an even split about the current use of Personal Plans for young people as a means of measuring progress, as opposed to consensus about the potential for Personal Plans to bring the essential elements together in terms of: identifying outcomes, establishing a baseline (where the young person is starting from), setting related goals and targets, monitoring progress, evaluating results, and reviewing development.

Table 1: Seven outcome areas relevant to Oberstown

Outcome area	Source
Communication skills Self-perception, communication, listening, collaboration, teamwork and interpersonal skills are essential in forming positive relationships	Barnes et al (2012) Parker et al (2014) Muldoon et al (1996)
Confidence and agency Self-esteem, self-efficacy and positive self-image, confidence and agency enable young people to recognise that they can make a difference to their own lives, and that effort has a purpose. There is evidence of a reciprocal link between positive outcomes and self-confidence.	Barnes et al (2012) Parker et al (2014)
Planning and problem-solving Planning, problem solving, critical reasoning, and decision-making, support resilience in providing young people with ‘positive protective armour’ against negative outcomes associated with risky life events.	Martinez (2008) Mitchel and Palmer (2004)
Relationships Greater trust between young people and young people and staff enables participation in productive activities.	Barrett and Baker (2012)
Creativity and imagination Developing creative capacities can have a positive impact on both self-esteem and overall achievement, and is related to resilience and well-being. Developing performance skills and musical knowledge, helps to develop persistence, and improve knowledge of one’s own potential.	Barrett and Baker (2012) Baker and Homan (2007)
Self-control Improved self-discipline leads to a reduction in disciplinary incidents, and in punitive sanctions and contributes to a safer environment for young people and staff, reductions in impulsiveness, a decrease in acting-out behaviours, enhanced levels of moral reasoning, less disruptive behaviour, increased compliance with rules, sense of belonging	Ford and Hawke (2012) Ezell and Levy (2003) Muldoon et al (1996) Zimmerman et al (1999) Amendola and Oliver (2010) Barnes et al (2012)
Health and well-being A greater knowledge of the harmful effects of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs, contribute to better health and mental well-being.	Baker and Homan (2007) Martinez (2008) Daykin et al (2012)

Personal Plans would be of little value unless set within a system of care surrounding each young person. According to survey responses and individual interviews this would involve initial assessment followed by regular meetings at unit level focusing on the needs of the young person and what is required going forwards. To be fully effective these meetings

would utilise information from the different services such as teaching, care and counselling. In this regard, however, staff noted concerns.

There's a breakdown of meetings – they are not happening. Young people's meetings are not happening. There's no immediate consequence for not completing records and no credit given either for completing records. (Participant 5)

The key thing is that you do need to measure things. There is no 'in the round' assessment. Staff do it informally, so there is no paper work, for example about their school record. (Participant 1)

More broadly, research suggests that services, programmes and interventions are more likely to be effective, and easier to evaluate, when they are underpinned by a clear theory of change, i.e. 'Why is this intervention necessary and what does it hope to achieve?' **One widely understood and accepted overarching theory of change for Oberstown could help staff and others to have a common understanding of the relationship between resources, activities and outcomes and a more practical sense of common mission** (for example, including the outcomes identified in Table 1).

Post release issues

The research indicates that learning is likely to be lost if individualised support for young people is not continued in the community. Therefore, attention must be given to post-release issues. As one staff member explained:

We need to understand that we are part of a process, with our intervention leading somewhere. Things could be improved, and we need to involve the community rather than just state agencies. It is more difficult with young people on remand, but we need to focus on integrating them back into the community before they leave us. Even small steps are useful, for example attendance at football practice back home. (Participant 1)

Clarification of the contribution made by Oberstown while young people are in detention helps to provide clear arguments for a wider systemic approach, which necessarily involves community-based agencies in providing an overall care/treatment package.

Approximating the ideal

The literature review, the online staff survey and the staff interviews surface a fundamental dilemma about purpose and direction at Oberstown. This can be expressed as a set of polarities which represent on the one hand an ideal (care and education), and on the other (containment and safety) the realities of practice at a time of extensive change and pressure on resources (see Table 2). It is not that the tendency towards care and education is not present, just that the push towards containment and safety is perceived to be strong.

The central issue for Oberstown, therefore, is about how to find the optimum blend between the two tendencies. In this regard, it may be useful to consider how containment and safety issues play out differently between those on longer term sentences and the shorter term remand population. Section two takes up this central issue in the form of seven steps to improve relationship building.

Table 2: Polarities between education and containment

Polarities	
Care and Education	Containment and safety
Focus on needs	Meet basic needs
Healthy environment	Strict environment
Comprehensive care plan	Limited care plan
Positive reinforcement	Emphasis on punishment
Development of skills and interests	Restrictive regime (boredom)
Availability of therapy	Limited support services
Proactive staff	Reactive staff
Constructive allocation of beds	Allocation of beds based on necessity
Coordination with external services	Isolated detention
Constructive engagement of staff	Staff focus on crowd control
Supportive and informed management	Reactive and distant management

SECTION TWO

Seven Steps to Improve Relationship Building

The overall purpose of the work has been to assist Oberstown to improve routine relationship building between teachers, care staff and young people by combining learning from 'what works' in similar settings, with the views of staff. The culmination of the work is presented in the form of seven steps to improve pro-social self-governance when a young person is subsequently released. The steps are informed by the 10 action statements that derive from the literature review, the online staff survey and the individual interviews (see Appendix 3). The steps should be seen as the means to achieving the seven outcomes shown in Table 1 in Section 1:

- Communication skills
- Confidence and agency
- Planning and problem solving
- Relationships
- Creativity and imagination
- Self-control
- Health and well-being

The seven steps involve:

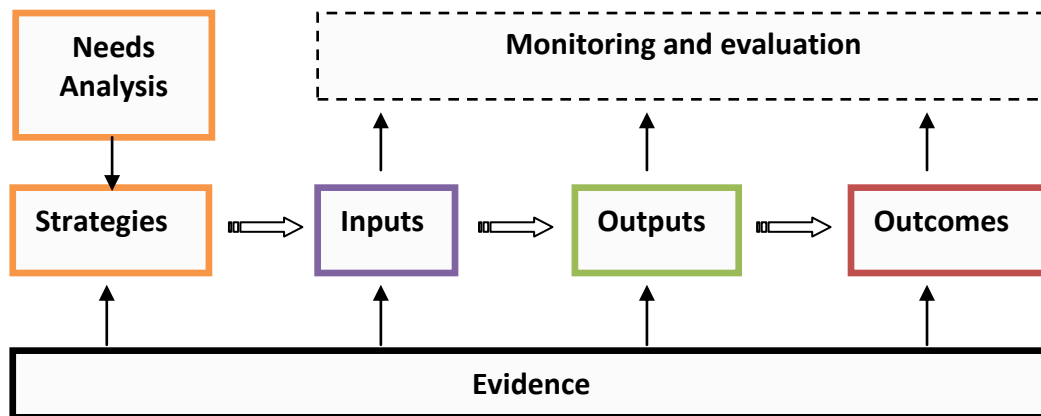
1. Setting out a clear theory of change for the Oberstown Campus, and being clear about intended outcomes
2. Providing an enabling structure at Oberstown, through routine actions, specific activities and specialised interventions
3. Focusing on the core elements of relationship building
4. Ensuring that the organisational environment reinforces the intended practices
5. Enabling learning and development for young people and staff
6. Capturing and measuring the desired change
7. Learning through continuous improvement cycles, evaluation and review.

Each of these steps is elaborated below.

1. A theory of change for the Oberstown Campus

A theory of change clarifies and makes explicit the various inputs, outputs and activities, and outcomes that the organisation, programme or intervention hopes to achieve and how these are conceptually and practically linked. One useful way to graphically express a theory of change is through logic modelling. The core elements of a logic model are shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Core elements in a logic model



A logic model can be useful to organisations in a number of ways:

- As a tool to support service and programme design.
- As a framework to develop vision and goals for the future in a tangible, measurable way.
- Helping to identify and understand the systemic nature of the work, the key linkages and cause and effect relationships.
- As a basis for quality assurance procedures.
- As a tool to help the organisation to balance its priorities, allocate resources and generate realistic plans.
- As a means of informing funders and other stakeholders about the work.

A logic model is best seen as a high level statement in which complex interventions or programmes can be expressed in one overarching graphic. If necessary, components of this high level model can have their own more detailed logic models. This 'nesting' of models helps to show how the various parts contribute to the whole. There might also be a need for a separate implementation plan to capture all relevant details. Changes that are needed during implementation do not necessarily require changes to the overall logic model. A possible Oberstown theory of change for improving young people's pro-social outcomes is provided in Appendix 1.

2. An enabling structure at Oberstown

It is clear that formal education and informal learning provide the basis for young people's development whilst in detention. Increasing participation in formal education enhances knowledge and skills while providing needed structure to the day. Creative and informal learning activities such as arts and crafts or cooking can increase young people's motivation while facilitating relationship building. Staff should be able to adapt to the children and young people's needs by being more responsive and flexible. At the same time, the units need to be more comfortable places in which it is possible to relax. An emphasis on formal education, informal learning, and creating a relaxed atmosphere, all convey important signals in terms of overall ethos, reinforcing development over correction.

If it is accepted that creating and sustaining the ideal conditions for the professional relationship is (over and above basic health, security and welfare) the key governance objective, ensuring stability and consistency of staffing is vital for the well-being of young people. Given the widely accepted differences between remand and committal/sentences, it might be useful to consider a more nuanced approach to relationship building. This would mean a lower or minimum set of expectations for what can be achieved with young people on remand, with an enhanced level for those with longer sentences. There are, therefore, a number of actions which institutionalise relationship building into structures, processes and culture, and which cluster together to give staff a better chance of building the necessary relationships with young people. These are:

- Consistency of staffing teams
- Accommodating remand and sentenced young people in their appropriate environment
- Establishing and maintaining a ratio between staff and young people that is consistent with building a good relationship.

The case of the [Mendota Juvenile Treatment Centre](#) is instructive in terms of what outcomes can be achieved through the power and ability of positive relationships between staff and young people in detention centres.

3. The core elements of relationship building

Given the challenging nature of relationship building between care staff and young people, it is important to clarify the core elements involved in building effective relationships:

Co-production is premised on the idea that all outcomes are *de facto* the results of interactions between staff and young people. This means equally that any policy intentions by Oberstown or DCYA to 'rehabilitate' are only realised in these relationships. Therefore, it is not a matter of things being done to or for young people, but that results are contingent on the extent of engagement by young people themselves, and the capacity of staff to create and sustain these relationships.

Purposeful conversation involves focussing staff interactions on building and expanding the communication efforts and strengths of the young people. Listening and paying attention is a conscious, deliberate and continuous activity, but one that has the potential to be a powerful therapeutic intervention.

Assessment refers to judgements staff make when they are gauging how a young person is reacting and feeling in the moment or more formal, explicit, transparent and structured processes that may utilise standardised measures and tests. Assessment enables staff to monitor and capture a young person's progress while also enabling them to understand the young person's needs.

Teachable moments occur when for a variety of reasons a young person may be more open and receptive than usual. In these moments staff can model positive behaviours in their everyday interactions with the young people.

Dialogue is at the heart of non-formal learning (which can help build social and emotional competence) rather than authority and instruction.

Staff can help to fill out and develop in detail what is involved in each of these elements, which in turn can be the focus of training.

The core elements could be informed by proven practices such as [Motivational Interviewing](#), specifically designed to achieve momentum in relationships with young people that may present as unmotivated. Motivational Interviewing is one example of an evidence-based approach which has particular application in cases where resistance to change is high. When staff express empathy, avoid arguing for change and work on ambivalence to strengthen commitment, they help offenders to develop 'change statements'. The reconviction rate of dropouts is often higher than that of matched comparisons who receive no intervention, which suggests that motivation to change behaviour is a key issue, alongside other contextual factors.

A more overarching model is provided by the [Trauma Affect Regulation: Guide for Education and Therapy](#) (TARGET), which shows how young people and staff practice the terminology and skills learned in all daily activities in the detention centre in order to reinforce and generalize this to their entire daily life. Adoption of such a model means expanding the role of staff from custodial monitoring to guiding young people constructively towards responsible behaviour. Programmes and approaches such as TARGET, however, should not be restricted to young people with severe traumatic stress histories or symptoms, as they may enhance self-regulation, behavioural self-control and coping skills with stress reactivity in all detained youth.

The core elements could usefully be seen as the means by which young people can be helped to develop competences in relation to seven outcome areas.

4. An organisation environment that reinforces the intended practices

Feedback from the staff survey and interviews suggest the need for closer support from unit managers regarding day-to-day work and rosters. It is a key part of the management role to provide supervision, and to provide staff with opportunities to reflect on their own work and learn from colleagues. This is essential in helping to develop the craft of relationship building over and above formal training. Each member of staff could be encouraged to build their professional profile, based on regular formative assessments and development strategies. Training opportunities need to be relevant, up to date and systematic in line with the needs of staff generally and as individuals. As mentioned with regard to step 3, training could focus on the framework for relationship building leading to the seven proposed outcomes. In times of extreme stress, however, training is not enough and there should be psychological support available for staff when needed.

5. Enabling learning and development for young people and staff

To reinforce the emphasis on learning and development over correction, there is consensus about the need for a simple and focused care plan for each young person. Logically, this is the principal mechanism through which progress can be monitored. An effective plan would be based on an initial assessment taking in specific learning and broad development needs framed by the proposed outcomes.

To support the plan process it is essential to improve communication and coordination among staff and between groups of staff. Staff need to come together through a regular sequence of internal meetings that should be focused on the development and well-being needs and progress of the young person. More broadly, there needs to be a clearer communication strategy with other professions (internal and external), and one that fully recognises the important role of the care staff in terms of what Oberstown is trying to achieve. This could be expressed in terms of the seven steps-seven outcomes framework

As part of the planning process, it is important to identify reintegration goals and support needs for each young person before leaving Oberstown. This means collaborating with external agencies (professional services and community based groups) on the exit plan and after care, based on the work already done.

6. Capturing and measuring the desired change

A focus on learning necessarily requires some means of measuring developmental outcomes, build on existing methods, and developing new ones as appropriate. It also means introducing and maintaining records of progress. This involves agreeing on an outcomes framework, such as the one proposed above (Table 1), and developing instruments and approaches that enable staff and young people to consider and capture progress. Staff have developed understandings of how to recognise development and progress, that can be captured in plain language and used to construct appropriate frameworks and tools.

7. Learning through continuous improvement cycles

While staff development activities are important, they are optimal when part of a systemic commitment to continuous improvement. A common sense and plain language approach that assists virtuous cycles of learning, that has been developed in the USA and used widely in the UK is Outcomes Based Accountability™ or Results Based Accountability™ (RBA). Performance Accountability is achieved through asking three simple questions:

1. What did we do?
2. How well did we do it?
3. Is anyone better off?

A commitment to continuous improvement involves:

- A systematic way of describing and documenting interventions which will involve monitoring and recording responses/changes.

- Trying something out, paying attention to the impact and results, and modifying the practice in light of the results.
- Making progressive improvements from many small steps as opposed to large scale systematic interventions and evaluations.




Conclusion

To be effective, a focus on relationship building needs to be integrated into routine processes. In general, there is a requirement for extensive buy-in from all staff to ensure that the approach is widely accepted and that responses are consistent. All those who interact with young people should understand the importance of social and emotional development, and that working to achieve this is a continuous and conscious activity. The seven steps leading to seven outcomes can go some way to support such activity.

Rather than simply being followed, **the seven steps need to be considered carefully by management and staff in light of what is realistic, and worth pursuing with time and effort.** A key factor will be the extent to which the steps fit with existing or emerging thinking and approaches. In the event of agreement on the overall approach, some or all of the steps will need to be further developed and filled out. Ideally the knowledge of staff can be used productively to develop the necessary practices. Figure 3 below summarises the steps and related actions that need to be considered using a simple traffic light system, where:

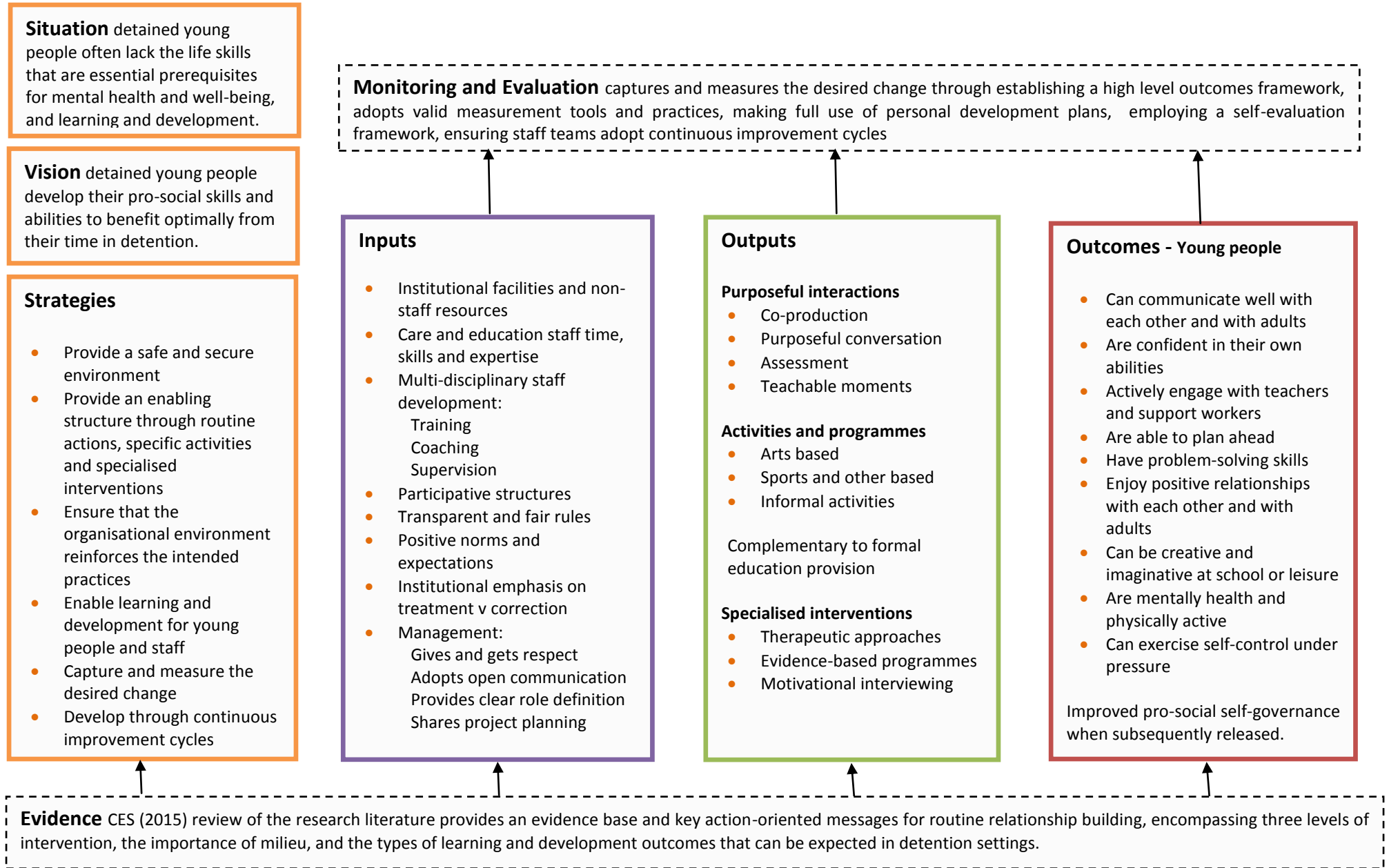
- Green can be taken up immediately
- Amber with more thought and preparation, and
- Red is not possible for the moment.

Table 3: Seven steps to seven outcomes

Seven steps to improving relationship building at Oberstown Campus	Take Up 	Consider 	No 
1. Set out a theory of change for Oberstown Campus <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Involve staff in development/validation of an overall theory of change to which all subscribe ii. Use the Oberstown model to explain and promote the unique contribution of Oberstown 			
2. Provide an enabling structure <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Increase engagement in formal education and non-formal learning (arts, sports) ii. Give leisure activities higher status and encourage them iii. Make the unit environment more comfortable iv. Consistency of staffing teams v. Accommodating remand and sentenced young people in their appropriate environment vi. Establishing and maintaining a ratio between staff and young people that is consistent with building a good relationship. vii. Support staff to be responsive and flexible to needs and interests of young people 			
3. Focus on the core elements of relationship building <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Emphasise and ensure knowledge of the importance of co-production, purposeful conversation, assessment, teachable moments, dialogue, as the Oberstown way ii. Draw selectively from proven techniques and approaches, e.g. Motivational Interviewing and TARGET 			
4. Ensure the organisational environment reinforces the intended practices <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Provide closer supervision and support from unit managers ii. Provide space for staff reflection, learning and sharing regarding work iii. Institute a professional development portfolio for all staff iv. Ensure plans are aligned to the 7 outcomes framework 			
5. Enable learning and development of young people and staff <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Establish a simple and focussed care plan for each young person to reflect the 7 outcomes ii. Distinguish between remand and committals regarding what can be expected iii. Ensure collaborative working between the different staff groups based on the needs of each young person iv. Ensure that each young person has a reintegration strategy as part of the plan 			
6. Capture and measure change <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Establish an outcomes framework (based on the 7 outcomes) and involve staff in determining indicators ii. Decide on the ways in which the outcomes can be measured at the level of the individual young person 			
7. Learn through improvement cycles <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Commit to continuous improvement cycles at individual, unit, and organisational levels 			

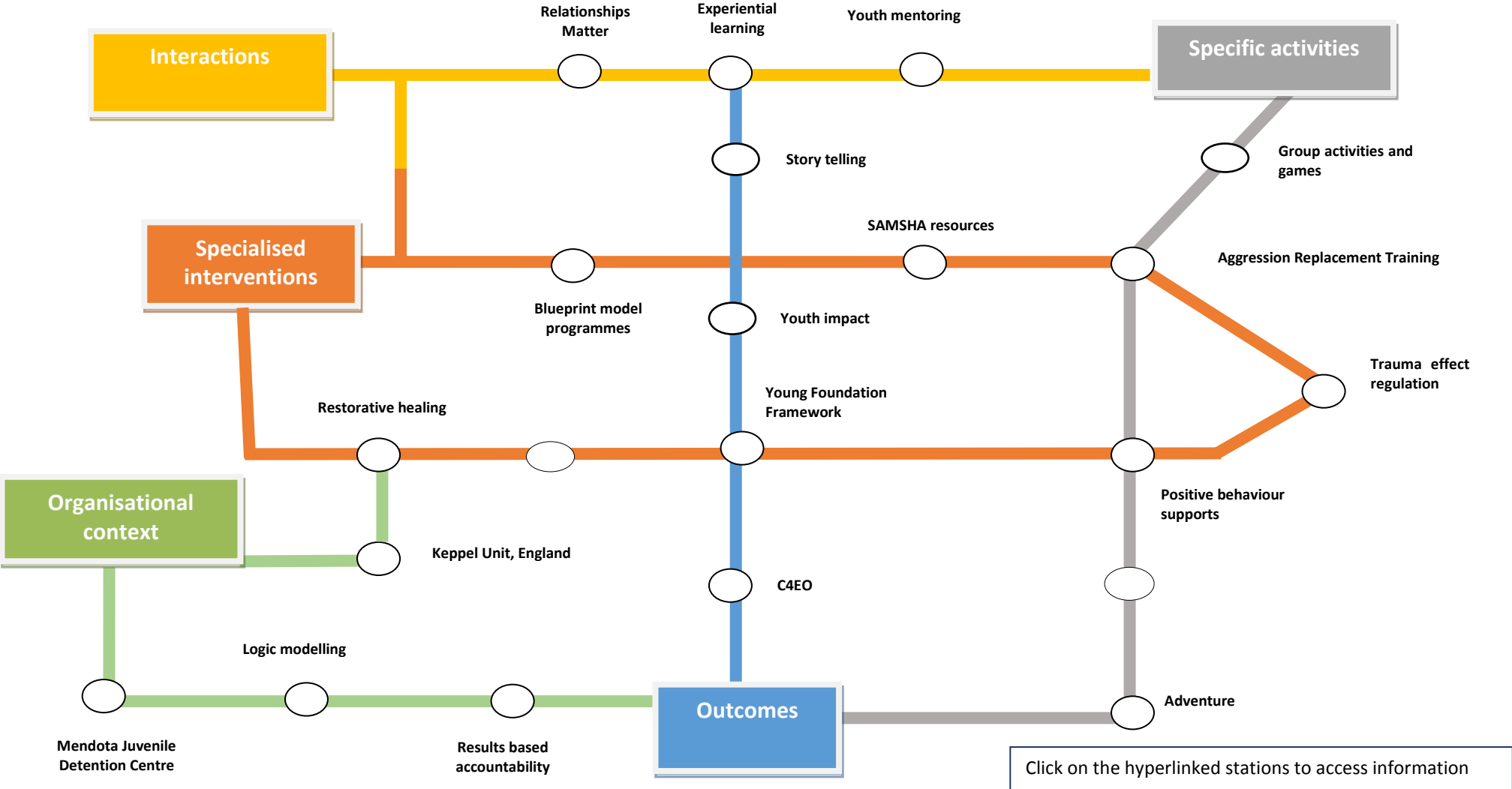
APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Possible Oberstown theory of change - improving pro-social outcomes



Appendix 2: Route map to resources

This route map is based on an original idea developed by the [Centre for the Use of Research and Evidence in Education](#) (CUREE) to make research accessible and useable for teacher and other educational practitioners.



Appendix 3: Action statements

These statements are derived from the Oberstown staff interviews. They encapsulate the views of staff in relation to the key points emerging from the literature review and the online survey. Because they are action-oriented they contribute to thinking about the next steps for Oberstown.

1. Allocation of staff to units

Staff need to be allocated to units based on affinities and bonds with young people, as opposed to simple availability. Ensuring stability and consistency of staffing is vital for the well-being of young people.

2. Outcomes and measures

There is a need to reinstate outcome measurements for young people's learning and development (where these existed), to develop new ones, and to introduce or maintain records of progress.

3. Working together

It is essential to improve communication and coordination among staff and between groups of staff, who need to come together through a regular sequence of internal meetings that should be focused on the developmental and well-being needs and progress of the young person.

There needs to be a clearer communication strategy with other professions (internal and external).

4. Establishment of a clear and simple care plan and follow through

There is a need for a simpler and more focused care plan for each young person, and progress in relation to the plan needs to be monitored. The plan should be based on an assessment taking in specific learning and broad development needs.

5. The role of staff and purpose of Oberstown

There needs to be a clear and consistent policy direction on the model to be followed (care or correction, or an appropriate synthesis – the presumption is in favour of care).

6. Resources to match staff motivation and dedication:

There needs to be closer support from management regarding day-to-day work and rosters.

There should be psychological support available for staff when needed.

Training opportunities should be relevant, up to date and systematic in line with the needs of staff generally and as individuals.

7. Flexibility and responsiveness

Staff should be able to adapt to the children and young people's needs by being more responsive and flexible. The units need to be more comfortable places in which it is possible to relax.

8. Creative activities

It is necessary to reinstate creative and informal learning activities such as arts and crafts and cooking, and giving these activities due respect by acknowledging the learning that occurs

9. Structured exit plan and due process

It is important to identify reintegration goals and support needs before leaving Oberstown, to prevent re-entry to the justice system. It is important to collaborate with external agencies (professional services and community based groups) on the exit plan.

10. Unit organisation

Bed allocation should be based on the needs and age profile of young people. It is essential to separate remands and committals.

The number of beds per unit needs to be kept at a level which is consistent with establishing good relationships and personal attention.

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