

# **Coping with Kidulthood: The hidden truth behind Britain's abandoned adolescents**



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## **A report by the Barrow Cadbury Trust**

This report will feed into the work of the newly formed Transition to Adulthood (T2A) Alliance, which has been convened by the Barrow Cadbury Trust.

### **The Transition to Adulthood (T2A) Alliance**

The T2A Alliance is a coalition of academics, campaigning organisations and practitioners working to improve the opportunities and life chances of young adults between the ages of 18-25 who are at risk of committing crime and falling into the criminal justice system. The Alliance aims to raise awareness of the problems this group face and to secure policy change to help improve their lives.

Chair – Rob Allen, Director of the International Centre for Prison Studies

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### **Alliance Members**

- The Barrow Cadbury Trust
- Catch22
- Centre for Crime and Justice Studies
- Clinks
- Criminal Justice Alliance
- NACRO
- The Prison Reform Trust
- Revolving Doors Agency
- The Young Foundation

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## **Foreword**

In 2005, the Barrow Cadbury Trust established the Commission on Young Adults and the Criminal Justice System, publishing a report of their findings, *Lost in Transition*, looking at the complex needs of young adults in the criminal justice system. That report confirmed the experiences of the organisation's grassroots groups: that young adults with complex needs are a neglected and over-represented group in the criminal justice system, which fails to address the underlying causes of their offending.

For most, adolescence is an exciting time of new opportunity and expanding horizons. But it is a tragedy that for a significant number their eighteenth birthdays can mark the beginning of the end for their life-chances, with doors closing rather than opening.

Whilst there is recognition that under 18s deserve support and are worth investing in, there is a complete attitudinal change once they are over 18.

While those from marginalised communities are left to fend for themselves, young adults from supportive backgrounds receive a turbo charge from the state to propel them into adulthood.

We know that those who benefit from the structure, encouragement and cajoling of loving parenting are more likely to succeed in life. Increasing numbers then attend the Institute for Transition to Adulthood known as university, where they benefit from state support. For example, they are handed a room in a hall of residence and counselling if caught taking drugs, while the authorities just sigh over petty crimes like stealing traffic cones. University provides young adults with an opportunity to develop their life skills and get a degree which eases them into employment and adult life.

Yet those who need state support the most in fact get the least. Disadvantaged young adults are often the most vulnerable, volatile and most in need of assistance. Yet the state's response is to coerce rather than counsel; punish rather than protect.

Those excluded from schools or put in the care system usually miss out on the basics: not just the soft stuff like loving cuddles and crucial role models, but also the tough love that comes from enforcing the rules. Without love and discipline, how are they supposed to be able to learn to take personal responsibility? If we give up on them, no wonder they give up on themselves. And as we know from the rising costs of crime – social and financial – that is not just bad for them, it's bad for us all.

It is a tragedy for those left behind and a tragedy for Britain. We have a generation of young adults who have been left to fall into adulthood without support during their transition, so it is no surprise that so many fall through the gaps. Our society needs to do much more to give them the parachute to a soft landing.

We need earlier, more appropriate and more effective intervention to support young people who have nobody to turn to.

Our society seems to expect those with the greatest needs and fewest resources to make a 'fast-track' into adulthood with little or no help. The medical evidence and psychological research shows that for some, the period of adolescence is lengthening as childhood is

shortening and adulthood is occurring much later in life. The transition to adulthood takes longer and is harder without support.

It is hardly surprising so many disadvantaged young adults fail and get caught up in the criminal justice system where young adult offenders are responsible for a third of all crime. Over half of young adults in custody go on to re-offend within a year of release and up to two-thirds re-offend within two years.

The quantitative research of the attitudes of young people to crime and punishment reveals significant support for initiatives that would help young people move away from crime rather than those just aimed at retrospective punishment. Of the 1001 young people polled, the majority feel that good schooling and opportunities to gain good work experience are vital to progressing away from crime – something many young people take for granted while a minority desperately lack.

It is for all these reasons that the Barrow Cadbury Trust is now building on the work of our 2005 Commission by convening the Transition to Adulthood Alliance. The Alliance consists of a coalition of academics, campaigning organisations and practitioners that believe marginalised young adults are a neglected group who are worth investing in. Over the next twelve months the T2A Alliance will be researching and campaigning for those policy options that can best support this age group. Our work will be formulated in a Green Paper in the spring and culminate in a White Paper in the autumn, a kind of manifesto for young adults.

In conjunction with the policy work of the Alliance, the Barrow Cadbury Trust is also funding three practical Transition to Adulthood local pilots, which will enable interventions to be tailored to the maturity and needs of the individual, reducing the risk of re-offending and promoting community integration.

Rachel Cerfontyne

## Executive Summary

The T2A Alliance is a coalition of organisations and individuals working to improve the life chances of young adults between the ages of 18 and 25 who are at risk of falling into the criminal justice system. This report will feed into our work over the coming year and provides the first building block in the creation of a campaign manifesto planned for 2009.

The report is based on two pieces of new empirical research commissioned exclusively for the T2A Alliance:

- The first, by the public opinion research company Populus, consists of focus group research comparing the life experiences of a group of male young offenders with a group of male university students.
- The second, by the market research company Com Res, is the result of opinion polling carried out among 1001 young people to test their attitudes towards a broad set of policy initiatives related to youth justice.

## Important findings of the Focus Groups

- All the young offenders stated that they had received little if any support from their family, their local community or the education system while growing up:

*“They [students] had parents that were there for them, who provided for them. I’ve not had that, me. I’ve had to live off myself”.* [Young Offender]

*“They [students] have always had MP3 players in their pockets and new trainers, we’ve had to get it ourselves”.* [Young Offender]

*“If you stopped a uni-student out on the street to get their food tonight, get their bed, and get their clothes for tomorrow they wouldn’t know the first f\*\*king thing to do. They’d be pulling out their iPhones and saying ‘oh, daddy, mummy’. They don’t know the first thing about how to hustle on the streets”.* [Young Offender]

- The young offenders also painted a bleak picture of their local neighbourhood. They spoke of a suffocating environment where crime was prevalent and a climate of fear existed within the community:

*“It’s a dog-eat-dog world. It’s every man for himself”.* [Young Offender]

*“You all join a firm so that you feel safe. I need my boys. It’s a form of survival”.* [Young Offender]

*“It [gang culture] has always been there, the only thing that’s different is the guns have come along. The violence has always been there but there didn’t used to be the guns”.* [Young Offender]

*“It’s a survival thing as well, because if people know that you’re sick, a people know that if they mess with you then you’re going to do something really nasty, then they leave you alone. If they don’t think you’re likely you’re going to get hurt more”.* [Young Offender]

*"It's different now. Even the kids that you knew years ago – who used to be quiet and never came out – are running around off their head. You're just like 'you're not like that, you're not the same kid I knew two years ago but now you're running around chopping people's heads off'. The climates changed and everyone thinks that you've got to be like that. You have to prove yourself". [Young Offender]*

- When talking about their day-to-day lives, all the young offenders talked of the twin imperatives of money and respect:

*"Everything nowadays is about money and reputation. That's why people sell drugs. You sell drugs to make your money, you make your money to make your reputation and just to live". [Young Offender]*

*"If you've been out on the graft and you've made the money you're like 'it's free money' and you'll spend it on whatever". [Young Offender]*

- Some said that prison – while being a stark punishment – was also a counter-productive environment where they learnt how to commit crime better rather than how to rehabilitate themselves:

*"You can go into jail because you've just done something small, but then you're sat there listening to everyone else talking and you're learning new s\*\*t and how to do new things". [Young Offender]*

- Similarly, once released from YOI, they revealed a lack of confidence in the structure put in place to help rehabilitate them into mainstream society through re-housing, work experience or employment:

*"If you had a job you probably wouldn't be going out robbing, but then when you go for a job they find you've got a record". [Young Offender]*

### **Key findings of the Polling**

- Of the 1001 young people polled **83%** say that getting work experience and having good job opportunities is a key factor in helping young people move away from crime.
- **76%** also believe that ensuring access to youth clubs and community centres for young people so that they can socialise and interact was important in countering youth crime.
- **82%** believe that it is important going to a school that does not tolerate bad behaviour and instils discipline and personal responsibility in its pupils.
- For young people who have drug or alcohol problems **78%** think that immediate and regular support by social services is an important way of tackling the problem.

# Focus Group Research

## METHODOLOGY

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Populus conducted two focus groups among young males in Manchester on 25<sup>th</sup> September 2008, one among young offenders and one among university students.

- The **young offenders** group was recruited by Barrow Cadbury and comprised young men aged 17 to 35, with most aged between 17 and 20. The young offenders had been convicted of a range of crimes including burglary, theft, dealing illegal substances, grievous bodily harm and kidnapping.
- The group of **students** was recruited by Populus and comprised young men who were aged between 19 and 22, whose parents were in socio-economic groups C2 or D. The students were enrolled at a range of universities - including Manchester Metropolitan, Salford, Bolton and Liverpool John Moores – and were studying various courses including sports science, business, economics, game design, geography, media, acoustics and psychology.

The groups followed a structured discussion moderated by a Populus director. The full discussion guide is reproduced in Appendix 1 to this report.

# 1. GROUP ONE: YOUNG OFFENDERS

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## FAMILY BACKGROUND

- Young offenders had a range of family set-ups, and all indicated that their family had been poor. Most said that their parents had struggled to provide for them and that they had largely been left to take care of themselves. When asked why they had ended up in a young offenders institution while other young people go to university, many said that they had been forced to deal with the harsh realities of life, like finding food for themselves, from an early age whereas most students had been provided for by their families.

*"You've got to make money for yourself". [Young Offender]*

*"I didn't have family to tell me that [to stop committing crimes]. I've grown up with aunties and uncles and cousins. I've lived all over the place. I've had a hard life". [Young Offender]*

*"That [selling drugs] is paying for my food and keeping me going". [Young Offender]*

*"Most of us were probably lucky because we've got people on the outside, but there were lots of people in their [the Young Offender Institution] without any family". [Young Offender]*

*"They [students] had parents that were there for them, who provided for them. I've not had that, me. I've had to live off myself". [Young Offender]*

*"They [students] have always had MP3 players in their pockets and new trainers, we've had to get it ourselves". [Young Offender]*

*"If you stopped a uni-student out on the street to get their food tonight, get their bed, and get their clothes for tomorrow they wouldn't know the first f\*\*king thing to do. They'd be pulling out their iPhones and saying 'oh, daddy, mummy'. They don't know the first thing about how to hustle on the streets". [Young Offender]*

- Some participants felt that if somebody had been there to take care of them or show them a better way to provide for themselves they would not have ended up burgling or selling drugs.

*"The only reason that young people go out stealing is that they don't know another way to make money. They've got the way to make money, but it's inside them. Somebody needs to show them the way to bring it out". [Young Offender]*

*"There needs to be more identification of people who are grafting or selling drugs or whatever. I went to jail for selling drugs and if someone had of stopped me doing what I did, then I would've have ended up going to jail". [Young Offender]*

*"My parents didn't know [I was selling drugs], you're a different person when you are around your parents". [Young Offender]*

- Although the young offenders were generally unwilling to discuss at length their relationship with their parents, several young offenders confessed to behaving differently in front of their parents and grandparents compared with how they acted when they were away from their family. Some participants said that they would moderate their language when they were around certain family members and - where they had taken drugs - they would try to conceal the outward effects of this.

*"You're two different people, when you're out on the street and when you're at home. When you're in with your nan and you don't swear and you don't smoke, and you're sat there sweating because your nan is looking at you". [Young Offender]*

*"No-one in this room is the same person when they're with their family [as when they're out on the street]. That's a fact". [Young Offender]*

*"You respect your family". [Young Offender]*

*"If I f\*\*k about [take drugs] at home I'll get kicked out, simple as. You've just got to chill and keep it all straight, even when your friends come round you all act differently". [Young Offender]*

## **NEIGHBOURHOOD**

- Young offenders had grown up in deprived neighbourhoods with few amenities or economic opportunities. Participants had usually lived in the same area for their entire life and, as such, had no concept of feeling safe or unsafe within their own neighbourhood. Some young offenders said they felt less safe if they travelled outside of their immediate area and encountered people they were less familiar with.

*"You've got your own area that you know and you chill in. And if you're going out to other areas you go to areas that you know". [Young Offender]*

*"If you see other people in your area that you haven't seen around, you're like 'what are you doing here?'" [Young Offender]*

- Although some participants said that establishing a reputation – in terms of distinguishing themselves as being particularly tough – had been crucial within their neighbourhood in order to survive, several felt that the pressures to do this were now greater and began at an earlier age.

*"It's different now. Even the kids that you knew years ago – who used to be quiet and never came out – are running around off their head. You're just like 'you're not like that, you're not the same kid I knew two years ago but now you're running around chopping people's heads off'. The climates changed and everyone thinks that you've got to be like that. You have to prove yourself". [Young Offender]*

*"It's a survival thing as well, because if people know that you're sick, a people know that if they mess with you then you're going to do something really nasty, then they*

*leave you alone. If they don't think you're likely you're going to get hurt more".*  
**[Young Offender]**

*"All the young kids have got too much anger inside them now".* **[Young Offender]**

- Although several participants had played sports when they were younger, many complained about a lack of sports clubs and social facilities in the area that they had grown up in. Some participants felt that, if such facilities had existed, they may have been less likely to get in trouble, although those who had participated in sport when they were younger said that they had gradually lost interest in such activities as they had grown older.

*"Maybe if there was something fun in the community [I wouldn't have got into these problems]. If you have something to do, you're laughing".* **[Young Offender]**

*"You need more entertainment. The little village where I lived, there's nothing, not even a little park".* **[Young Offender]**

*"The youth club in Middleton is like the size of this room".* **[Young Offender]**

*"There used to be sports centres to keep people out of trouble. There used to be football competitions, basketball competitions".* **[Young Offender]**

*"I was a member of a football club until I started smoking weed".* **[Young Offender]**

*"You lose interest as you get older. I used to be into basketball and football but you get to being 15 or 16 and started smoking and hanging around with bad people you lose interest".* **[Young Offender]**

## **PEERS**

- Young offenders' friendship groups generally comprised people living in their neighbourhood from similar family and social backgrounds. Most had not been members of 'formal' gangs, although all said that their friendship group had offered a form of protection from potential threats in their area. Young offenders did not feel as though gang activity had become more of a problem in recent years, but some felt that carrying knives and guns had become more commonplace and that this meant that the consequences of gang activity had become more serious.

*"You all join a firm so that you feel safe. I need my boys. It's a form of survival".*  
**[Young Offender]**

*"It [gang culture] has always been there, the only thing that's different is the guns have come along. The violence has always been there but there didn't used to be the guns".* **[Young Offender]**

*"It's a dog-eat-dog world. It's every man for himself".* **[Young Offender]**

- Young offenders said that, since their early teens, they and their friends would spend most of their time 'hanging out', which usually meant spending time at one another's houses, drinking and taking drugs. All had tried alcohol and so-called 'soft' drugs like cannabis when they were in their early teens and most had gone on to try 'harder' drugs like cocaine. Some young offenders admitted to having dealt drugs – usually as a way of funding their own habit – with a few mentioning that this was an important way for people in their area to build their 'reputation'.

*"You just spend your time chilling and smoking weed".* **[Young Offender]**

*"Everybody goes up in stages: from class B to A. You have a bit of weed and then your weed dealer might know someone who sells a bit of coke". [Young Offender]*

*"Everything nowadays is about money and reputation. That's why people sell drugs. You sell drugs to make your money, you make your money to make your reputation and just to live". [Young Offender]*

*"I guarantee you; everybody in here has had class A drugs". [Young Offender]*

*"I've sold everything [every kind of drug] in the book, me". [Young Offender]*

- Taking drugs was something the young offenders had done as a pastime, with most saying that they had started taking drugs because there was nothing better for them to do with their time. Most felt that taking cannabis had not done them any harm, although several said that it probably led to 'harder' drugs like cocaine that were seen by some as being potentially more dangerous.

*"Once you start smoking weed the next thing is you start getting offered sniff [cocaine]". [Young Offender]*

*"I know people who smoke weed and run out of money but don't go out grafting [burgling]. It [crime] is not about the weed". [Young Offender]*

*"I am not an addict, I am a weed-fiend. I'll probably go home and smoke a twenty bag tonight but I know what I am doing, I am in control." [Young Offender]*

*"I think weed is a good thing, it chills people out. You don't go out getting into trouble because you can't be arsed". [Young Offender]*

*"It [cannabis] makes you sit back and think about what you're doing. You don't want to hurt anyone on weed". [Young Offender]*

- Several young offenders indicated that, as they had entered their teens, they had started to go out 'grafting' - by which they meant burgling houses - with their friends. Those who admitted to this said that this was something they would do if they owed money to drug dealers or if they and their friends were short of cash.

*"It's starts off with smoking weed, then you start getting in debt, then you've got to rob to pay your debts off". [Young Offender]*

*"I just chill round at mine most the time, and then you go out grafting when you've got no money". [Young Offender]*

- Participants distinguished between ‘clean’ money – earned legitimately - , which had been ‘earned’ and was therefore, more valued and in some way better, and ‘dirty money’ that had been acquired illegally – several young offenders said that the money they gained from burglary or theft was ‘free money’ and usually spent immediately on things like drugs or clothes – which a few participants indicated were an important measure of status.

*“If you’ve been out on the graft and you’ve made the money you’re like ‘it’s free money’ and you’ll spend it on whatever”. [Young Offender]*

*“It feels different smoking that weed [drugs that have been bought with legitimate earnings] because I’ve worked for that money and paid for that weed. I’ve not grafted for that, I can enjoy it”. [Young Offender]*

*“You graft to get money for clothes”. [Young Offender]*

*“You do it [burgling] to look smart. You get people coming back from a fat graft going ‘look at my new clothes, check my f\*\*\*ing watch and rings and all that. It is about the money”. [Young Offender]*

*“When you get a job you’re too tired to go out doing anything else. And the money, I worked hard for that money, I am not spending it on no drugs”. [Young Offender]*

## EDUCATION

- Many young offenders complained about having been singled out at school by their teachers for being disruptive even though most claimed that they had been willing to learn. Others complained about having been ignored by teachers when they had been willing to participate in classes and said that this had frustrated them. Most indicated that they had regularly been in trouble at school, often for reasons that they did not understand or that they felt were completely unfair. Young offenders indicated that, as they had entered their teen years, they had either become frustrated or had started to lose interest in school, and that they had attended less and less as they grew older.

*“In my first school I was told, you’re in all of the top sets for everything, but you’re behaviour isn’t good enough for you to go there. Just because I want to talk to somebody while I am doing my work they think; ‘oh yeah, you’re disruptive’”. [Young Offender]*

*“You’re always getting pushed back. They ask a question and you put your hand up but they [the teacher] are just like; ‘I don’t want to talk to you’ and they ask someone at the front. There’s no point in trying”.*

*“I was first excluded when I was 13. I went to loads of schools”. [Young Offender]*

*“I used to always get kicked out of my lessons but that’s because I f\*\*ked around all the time. But I still wanted to get the grades, I just wanted to have a laugh in class as well”. [Young Offender]*

*“I was in bottom sets for everything, but it was because of my behaviour in class”. [Young Offender]*

*“They always helped the people at the front of the class. They know that stuff so why don’t you come and help me?” [Young Offender]*

*"It [the way we were treated in school] goes back to stereotyping about hoodies. You come into school with a hoodie on and you're disruptive and all this". [Young Offender]*

## **EXPERIENCE IN YOUNG OFFENDERS' INSTITUTION**

- Participants all said that they had not known what spending time in a young offenders institution would be like, with many saying that if they had known what it was going to be like before they had offended that they would have been less likely to have got involved in crime.

*"None of it becomes real until you're sat in that cell. None of it. Before you've been to jail you just carry on going in and out of the police station thinking you're going to keep getting bailed [...] You don't believe you're going until you're there". [Young Offender]*

*"If you put people in, people who haven't got a big record, and just put them in for the first night and then bring them out and say 'stop f\*\*king about or you'll end up here', half the people would stay out". [Young Offender]*

*"Most people come out [of young offenders institutions] worse than what they were when they went in". [Young Offender]*

- Even though many young offenders said that if they had experienced prison before they were convicted that they would have been less likely to have committed crimes, several also felt that prison had not necessarily done them any good. Some felt that being around other offenders had given them a greater awareness of the means by which crimes could be committed, while others said that on leaving prison they were sent straight back to the environment that they had been in before they had been convicted.

*"Jail hasn't done me any good, because I can just come out and carry on doing what I am doing". [Young Offender]*

*"You can go into jail because you've just done something small, but then you're sat there listening to everyone else talking and you're learning new s\*\*t and how do new things". [Young Offender]*

*"Because of the way the drugs tests work in prison, some people go in smoking weed and come out addicted to Heroin". [Young Offender]*

- All of the young offenders expressed some willingness to change their ways and had volunteered to participate in this focus group partly on that basis. They had a 'lights on' moment when they had realised that they could not, and no longer wanted to, carry on behaving as they had. Participants indicated that they were now willing to straighten out their lives but all felt frustrated about barriers that they now saw as being in their way.

*"It [jail] is an experience to learn from, and if you don't learn from it you end up going back in". [Young Offender]*

*"You're sat there in you sell thinking about things. It's like you get slammed in the face you tell yourself to wake up and stop acting like a child and start acting like a young adult and go get a job and show the rest of the world you can do it just like anybody else". [Young Offender]*

## LOOKING AHEAD

- Most participants were aware of organisations that were there to help them following their release – such as Connections, the Job Centre, Social Services and the Samaritans – although most felt such organisations were unable to help them overcome barriers to employment.

*“There’s a lot of help, you can talk to people and you can try to get onto these schemes. You go to the job-centre, you go to connections, and they can help you get to where you want to be as soon as you switch on and decide you want to sort it out”.*  
**[Young Offender]**

*“There’s organisations like the Samaritans”.* **[Young Offender]**

*“Social services or connections can sometimes get you into a kid’s home or a hostel or something”.* **[Young Offender]**

*“The job-centre sometimes takes you to interviews if you can’t get there”.* **[Young Offender]**

- A few young offenders had jobs, but there was a universal sense of frustration among participants about their employment prospects. All young offenders felt that their past meant that they had limited opportunities when it came to getting a job; if they omitted their criminal record from their CV they were likely to be caught out and if they disclosed it they would not be considered. Furthermore, criminal record checks were now so widespread that it was impossible for the young offenders to prove their trustworthiness through volunteer work.

*"It's like this; it you were going to employ somebody and it was between me and him – he's never been in trouble and I've been to jail and that – and we have the same GCSEs and that, you're going to pick the other person". [Young Offender]*

*"You'd rather tell the truth [on your application form] but you know that when you lie you are going to get found out, and they're like: why didn't you tell the truth? Well, because you wouldn't have given me the job." [Young Offender]*

*"Nobody will even give me voluntary work, just to get the experience. I tried ringing round agencies saying that I'd do voluntary work for a month and then you can give me a reference at the end or take me on, but they wouldn't have me". [Young Offender]*

*"If you had a job you probably wouldn't be going out robbing, but then when you go for a job they find you've got a record". [Young Offender]*

*"If everyone in here got offered a job, hardly anyone would go back to robbing and selling drugs". [Young Offender]*

*"A criminal record is not that bad but once you've been in jail you have to know somebody to give you the job, you can't just go in and fill the application in and get the job". [Young Offender]*

- Some young offenders felt that there were not enough opportunities for them to improve themselves while they were in prison, with several complaining that the activities that were on offer did not lead to the formal qualifications that they needed in order to help them into employment upon their release.

*"I took some courses in prison but nobody wanted to know about them when I came out". [Young Offender]*

*"You don't do anything on the inside". [Young Offender]*

*"When I went in I told them that I had a GCSE in English, fair enough it's the only one I've got. And they said there wasn't anything else I could do – so I can't do a different subject or A-Levels, or even improve my GCSE grade. They couldn't do that". [Young Offender]*

*"I did brick-laying but nobody is giving me a job". [Young Offender]*

*"I did a computer building course but I didn't get a qualification for it. I did it for a month and a half and I've not got jack-s\*\*t for it". [Young Offender]*

- Although there was some recognition among young offenders that the choices they had made when they were younger had led to their current situation, most felt that difficult circumstances when they were growing up were at least partly to blame. There was a general feeling among young offenders that society looked down on them, and all felt that people were not willing to give them a second chance.

*"People just think, 'oh, you're wearing a hoody; you're a thief'". [Young Offender]*

*"They think it's all our own choices, but it's like we've been talking about today, there's all these other things influencing you. Yeah, some of it is your own choice, but not a lot of it". [Young Offender]*

*"If you're in a situation where things go missing they're looking at you straight away. They could have misplaced it but that's what they do, that's what people do". [Young Offender]*

*"People don't believe that you've changed. It's like when you go for a job, they're like 'oh, you've been to prison, there's no way you're changing'". [Young Offender]*

*"I think that they should have a job lined up waiting for you [when you leave the Young Offender's Institution]". [Young Offender]*

## 2. GROUP TWO: STUDENTS

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### FAMILY BACKGROUND

- The students came from families where their parents were in socio-economic groups C2 or D, and most were the first members of their family to go to university. These participants came from a mixture of family set-ups, with some indicating that their parents were still together while others had been brought up mainly by one of their parents.

*"I only live with my mum. My dad lives in Cheadle". [Student]*

*"I come from, it's not like a broken home, my mum was dead loving and everything, but we didn't have a dad around and we lived in a pretty nasty area, but most of my friends from school had mums and dads who lived together". [Student]*

*"I am from a single parent family". [Student]*

- Most students said that, although they had not been expected or forced to go to university, their parents had been happy that they had chosen to do so. Many students said that their parents had not minded what route they had taken so long as they had made a success of themselves.

*"I am the first person in my family to go to university. I never really felt a strong expectation to go but when I was in school they [my parents] always encouraged me". [Student]*

*"I am the first generation [in my family to go to university]. I carried on at sixth form and did A-levels. Once I done that they [my parents] said 'obviously there's further education if you want to go to University or you can go into work experience'. Both options were open". [Student]*

*"My dad wouldn't have been disappointed if I hadn't gone to university, if I had made something of myself without going to university. That would've been fine". [Student]*

*"I've always been encouraged to want to further myself in education by my mum. She's always there to say 'you can do the things I was never able to do' but there was never any pressure to do them". [Student]*

- Most students felt that their parents had done a good job of raising them and several cited examples of situations or occasions where their parents had disciplined them or offered guidance to them. Some students said that their upbringing had been an important and positive influence on how they had turned out.

*"My mum would kick my head in if she found out I'd skipped school". [Student]*

*"I didn't know what I wanted to do at uni, but my dad told me to do something that I'd enjoy and that I am interested. I am really into computer games so I took a game design course".*

*"I'd say affection is important as well. If you're shown affection when you're a child it's bound to give you a step in right direction". [Student]*

*"I've got a lot of respect for my mum because she's brought me and all my brothers and sisters on her own". [Student]*

*"If your parents are the only people showing affection to you and believing in you, you don't want to let them down. When you know your parents are proud of you it's the best feeling in the world. When you show your mum your results and they're really happy". [Student]*

- When asked who their role models were growing up, many students mentioned members of their family such as parents, grandparents and older siblings. Several students said that they tried to make their parents proud.

*"I lived with my dad when I was going through school and he was quite disciplined. I used to do things to try and impress him, in a way". [Student]*

*"Your parents have a big role in how they bring you up and how they teach you". [Student]*

*"I think there's a mixture of people you look up to; it's your parents, your grandparents, and famous people or people in the public eye". [Student]*

*"I looked up to my brother. He's eleven years older than me and I've just always wanted to better him, but I always looked up to him. I could see what I had to achieve to get at that level or beyond". [Student]*

*"I always looked up to my teachers, especially my PE teachers. There was one who was a big inspiration to me and was one of the reasons that I wanted to go into teaching". [Student]*

*"My mum gave me a good upbringing". [Student]*

*"Making your parents proud and getting a qualification, and just making something of your life is the main thing to reach". [Student]*

*"You're like their [your parent's] asset, so you try and do your best for them". [Student]*

## NEIGHBOURHOOD

- Only a few of the students had grown up in areas that they would describe as 'rough' but most knew, either locally or through school, some people who behaved as though they had. Although some had been robbed or attacked or knew people who had, most students said that they had generally found it easy to avoid trouble and that they had felt safe in their own neighbourhoods.

*"I grew up in Leeds Harehills. It's not exactly a good area, but it's not exactly a rough area either. I would put it somewhere in the middle, I wouldn't say it's rough, rough, because I've lived there all my life".*

*"I didn't realise how nice the area I grew up in was until I started going to a college in Hulme. It was like a different world".* **[Student]**

*"There are rough areas in every neighbourhood, but it's not difficult to avoid trouble".* **[Student]**

*"I was from the outside of Manchester. It's no Moss Side but it's not nice a nice place, it's pretty rough. My brother got mugged loads of times".* **[Student]**

*"My area was alright really, not rough".* **[Student]**

## PEERS

- Most students said that they had at one time or another been friends with people who their parents may have considered to have been part of a 'bad crowd', with one participant revealing that he had narrowly escaped a spell in a young offenders institution following an incident for which his friends had been incarcerated. Some of these students indicated that such friends had gone on to get involved with crime and drugs.

*"I had a bit of rough patch, and that. I basically got put on tag. It's probably the best thing that's ever happened to me. I was doing my A-Levels at the time and I got put on tag for six months so I wasn't allowed to go out in the evenings, so all I could do was revise [...] I was within inches of going to jail, of the 4 of us who were involved in this fight, I was the only one who didn't go to jail". [Student]*

*"There was people at school who used to smoke weed and stuff, and I used to hang around with them. I wasn't really into it at the time, but my dad knew and my grandparents knew and they weren't very happy". [Student]*

*"I still see my old friends occasionally. There's a good 5 of them who are always in and out of jail". [Student]*

*"A couple of my mate's dads were dealers. They've gone on to the hard stuff now. I saw one of them in the pub and he had a bag and asked me if I wanted some, then he sat down and all of a sudden his nose started bleeding. They're hooked and they got into dealing, I leave them to it and don't get involved". [Student]*

*"A load of my friends started smoking weed, got board of that, and then started sniffing a load of coke". [Student]*

- When asked why they had turned out differently from those friends who had been involved with drugs and crime, some students attributed it to changes in circumstances – such as moving schools or making new friends – which they felt had altered the course of their life, while others believed that they had simply made better choices.

*"I'd say that the friends that I had when I started high school, they're the ones who started smoking weed and that and I did that for a bit. Then in Year 9 I did well in my exams and got put to a higher group, then I made some new friends and started hanging round with them more. The other friends have gone on to do apprenticeships, which I am not saying is bad, and they've gone on to take harder drugs. And the other group of friends that I have had from Year 9 onwards, we're all at uni. It's definitely like the people you hang around with can change who you are".*  
**[Student]**

*"You had people who used to smoke at the back of the bus, you usually got a few people smoking, but not weed. But the school I went to was quite good, it was in a village called Wetherby and it was quite nice, but the school I went to before was in Seacroft and it was a boys school that's shut down now, but me and my brother had a bit of a rough time there so we moved after 2 years. You had a few people smoking weed there but it was mostly fighting, so we just had to move out".* **[Student]**

- Several participants spoke of friends they had known through school who had also gone to university, having had a positive impact on them and how they had turned out. Some said that they had either met these friends by chance – through being placed in higher sets at school – or that they had always known these people.

*"A lot of my friends from school went to university, so that has probably shaped it as well".* **[Student]**

*"From school I've hung around with pretty middle class people and perfect families, and they were all quite determined and all went to uni, and I did the same. I think you tend to follow your peer group".* **[Student]**

- Most of the group had tried alcohol in their teens. A few students admitted to having tried cannabis either when they were younger or at university, with some saying that such drugs were particularly prolific in the university environment. Several had friends from their childhood who had started taking drugs like cannabis and were now involved with 'harder' drugs like cocaine.

*"I was 14 when I started smoking".* **[Student]**

*"I think it [drugs] is worse at university. I've seen it more here than I did at High School. Maybe it was the school I went to".* **[Student]**

*"I know somebody who used to be squeaky clean, but since they've gone to uni they've been doing pills, MDMA, every sort hallucinogenic and club drug you can think of".* **[Student]**

*"Yeah, you'd drink when you went to house party's".* **[Student]**

*"I was about 14 or 15 when I started going to the local pub".* **[Student]**

*"You'd just go and find somewhere to drink, and you'd just drink whatever got you pissed as quickly and cheaply as possible".* **[Student]**

- Most of the students had been involved in sports when they were growing up. A few had been heavily involved in football, playing at the academy level for Premier League or Football League clubs.

*"I took part in athletics at school and used to do sprinting or whatever. I also played cricket".* **[Student]**

*"I've played for a football team since I was about 8".* **[Student]**

*"I played for Oldham Athletic up until I was about 15". [Student]*

*"When I was 12 or 13 I signed for Blackburn Rovers and then when I was 15 I signed for Liverpool but then I ruptured my ligaments twice and was released from football". [Student]*

## EDUCATION

- Most of the students indicated that they had either enjoyed school or had felt indifferently towards it, with some describing going to school as being 'a social thing'. Although several participants felt that they had probably got through school doing the minimum amount of work they could get away with, most of the students said that they had been identified as being relatively academically successful at school. Almost all of the students said that they had attended school regularly and none indicated having ever become completely disengaged from it.

*"I just seemed to scrape through [school]. In year 7 I was really good but then I seemed to gradually go down". [Student]*

*"When I was in school it was more like a social event, rather than to take your education seriously. I must have heard the word potential a million times, but I never did the homework in time or I was always chatting". [Student]*

*"I was quite clever in school, so I mixed with lots of cleverer people". [Student]*

*"I was good in school, I was surprisingly clever." [Student]*

*"I used to take school really seriously; it was when I started college that I started to mess around". [Student]*

*"I enjoyed going in [to school] and seeing everyone and being with my friends, and playing football at break and dinner, that was the thing that I didn't want to miss". [Student]*

*"Even if I was dying, I was going to school. My mum wouldn't let me miss a day". [Student]*

*"Looking back I enjoyed school, but at the time I thought it was the worst thing in the world. I'd still go every day". [Student]*

## LOOKING AHEAD

- All of the students felt in control of their own destiny, and most had particular ambitions that they were hoping to achieve.

*"Yes [I feel in control of my destiny], it's about your own potential and how you use your own potential". [Student]*

*"I think you've just got to believe you'll make the right choices when the decisions come along". [Student]*

*"Yeah, I feel in control of my own future". [Student]*

*"I am going to get a Phd". [Student]*

- When asked why they had turned out as they had whereas other young people had ended up in young offender institutions, students were split as to whether or not those who had got into trouble were to blame for how things had turned out, with

some attributing outcomes to circumstances while others put it down to personal decisions.

*"Once you get to a certain age it is your own fault and your own decisions, you either do one thing or you do another; simple as". [Student]*

*"People have gone through s\*\*t and come out of it. They're accountable for their own decisions, if they do something they're the only ones you can punish. But if they're going to come out of it they've got go through it first. You can't throw them in a cell and lock away the key, you've got to give them some sort of opportunity because they can't do it on their own, they've not been brought up that way". [Student]*

*"If somebody has ended up in that kind of a situation [going to YOJ] I feel that it's because they've not been provided with the opportunities and the surrounding to make them go the right way, whatever the right way is". [Student]*

*"Everyone makes their own choices but some people are brought up and born with more choices to choose from". [Student]*

*"My friends are all addicted to stuff now. I think the difference is that I don't get addicted to stuff very easily". [Student]*

- Several students felt that there were certain groups of young people, who came from broken homes and who had grown up in areas where amenities or economic opportunities were hard to come by, for whom avoiding a life of crime was extremely difficult.

*"I think it is a wrong place, wrong time sort of thing [that explains why some people end up in trouble while others go to university]". [Student]*

*"It's not their fault, it's kids bringing up kids. Every kid seems to come from a broken home and there is no family ethos, there's no stability in their lives". [Students]*

*"I tend to feel sorry for them [people who got into trouble]. The person you end up being depends on what's happened to you in your life. I don't think anyone starts out like that". [Student]*

- Some students, however, were less sympathetic and felt that those who got into trouble had made bad choices and only had themselves to blame for their situation. These participants generally felt that, where they were able to demonstrate that they had changed, people who had made bad choices should be allowed a second chance.

*"They are weak. My friends are weak people. One of my close friends is a really weak man, he's started taking steroids now. He's got no self-discipline or drive, he's just happy with what he's doing". [Student]*

*"It's their decision [people who end up in trouble]. I know people who have been through a lot of s\*\*t and have dug themselves out of it and are now doing very well for themselves, and I know other who have carried on and are now in even more s\*\*t. It's all about your own decisions and you personally". [Student]*

*"I've got sympathy for some of my mates but ultimately it is their own fault, they got themselves into the mess they're in". [Student]*

*"You're responsible for your own decisions – that's basically what I believe. You can either make yourself good or you can make yourself bad". [Student]*

*"I think everyone needs a second chance. If they've improved and they're on the right track then I don't see why not". [Student]*

*"They [young offenders] need to show that they want to improve". [Student]*

# Polling

## METHODOLOGY

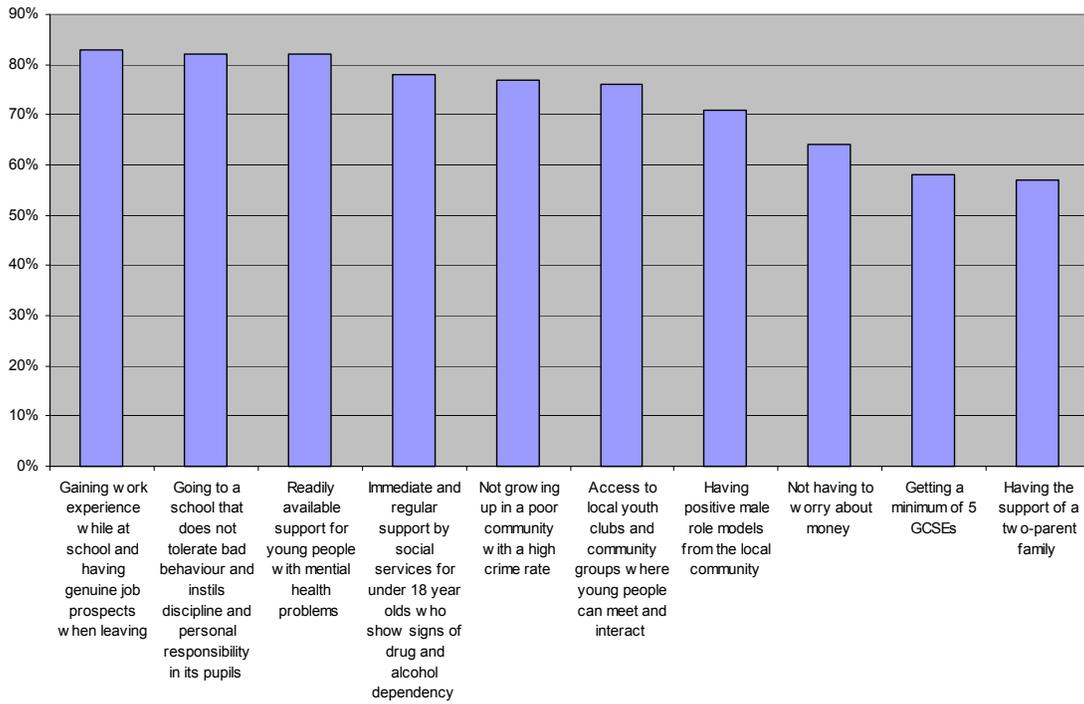
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ComRes surveyed 1001 16-24 year olds in Great Briton using online questionnaires between 20<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> August 2008 on issues around crime and young offenders.

**How important, or otherwise, do you think each of the following is in stopping young people becoming involved in violent crime?**

Gaining work experience while at school and having genuine job prospects when leaving	83%
Going to a school that does not tolerate bad behaviour and instills discipline and personal responsibility in its pupils	82%
Readily available support for young people with mental health problems	82%
Immediate and regular support by social services for under 18 year olds who show signs of drug and alcohol dependency	78%
Not growing up in a poor community with a high crime rate	77%
Access to local youth clubs and community groups where young people can meet and interact	76%
Having positive male role models from the local community	71%
Not having to worry about money	64%
Getting a minimum of 5 GCSEs	58%
Having the support of a two-parent family	57%

**How important do you think each of the following is in stopping young people becoming involved in violent crime?**



## APPENDIX A: DISCUSSION GUIDE

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### INTRODUCTION [10 MINS]

Populus is an opinion research company based in London. It's best known for carrying out polling for organisations like the BBC and the Times, but it also runs discussion groups like these to find out why people think what they think, not just how many people are thinking one way or another.

We are recording proceedings but all of your comments will remain anonymous. Nothing will be attributed to you directly, so please be as outspoken as you want to be. And please feel free to disagree with each other, just try not to talk over one another or we might miss something important that someone has said.

I'd like to start by quickly going round the room and finding out a little bit more about each of you in turn: can you give me your first name and how old you are...

- a) [YO ONLY] the reason that you were in a Young Offenders Institute, how long you served; and how long it has been since you were released.
- b) [STUDENTS ONLY] the University you are studying at, what you are studying, how long you have been studying for and when you will finish.

How would you describe your childhood? Do you have generally happy or sad memories of growing up, or an even mixture of both? Are there any particular things [people / places/ periods] about your childhood that make you feel happy / sad? Why?

### NEIGHBOURHOOD AND PEERS [15 MINS]

#### TOPICS COVERED:

- **Neighbourhood set-up**
- **Peer group**
- **Nature of interactions with peers and neighbours**
- **Main activities growing up**
- **Experience of formal clubs and sports teams**

**How would you describe the neighbourhood you grew up in?** Did you live in a city, town or in the countryside? Were most the people in your neighbourhood well-off or poor? **Did the neighbourhood you grew up in feel safe?** If not, why? Were you ever attacked or mugged in your neighbourhood? Did most of the people in your neighbourhood get along? If not, what sort of problems occurred? Were problems usually resolved? How? **Did you get along with people in your neighbourhood?**

**Aside from your family, who did you generally spend time with when you were growing up?** Did you meet most of your friends from living in your neighbourhood, or at school, or both? Were they mostly male? Did you have any friends from school who were not from your neighbourhood / from a different background? Did you have many friends when you were growing up? Were most of your friends the same age as you? Did you know many people who were in a similar situation to you when you were growing up? Did you tend to make friends with people who were in a similar situation to you?

**What sort of things did you and your friends get up to?** Where did you go? How often did you go out with your friends in the evenings and at weekends? **Were there a lot of things to do in your area / neighbourhood?** **Did you and your friends play sports?** If so, was it for a properly run local team or was it just you and your friends kicking a ball around? If you played for a proper team, who or what encouraged you to join? Did the people in charge of your team look out for all of the players? Did they teach you the rules of the sport? **Did you or your friends get involved with other kinds of clubs?** (After school clubs, youth clubs, scouts, etc). If so, were there older people running the groups and looking out for the people who went to these clubs? If you didn't get involved with sports

or clubs, was this mainly because there wasn't anything of this sort in your neighbourhood or was it because of something else?

## **CRIME AND DRUGS [15 MINS]**

### **TOPICS COVERED:**

- **Experiences with drugs and alcohol**
- **Experiences with crime**
- **Guidance, help and support received from guardians and other adults**
- **Personal expectations and expectations of peers**

**Did you and your friends look out for each other?** Did you feel safe within your group of friends? Were there gangs in your neighbourhood? Were you a member of a gang? Was it a proper gang - where you fought against other gangs - or was it just a group of friends? Were you pressured by other people into joining a gang or did you want to join? Who pressured you? What sort of things did your gang do? [Probe for: fighting, stealing, selling drugs] Did you carry weapons with you? If so, did you ever expect that you would end up using it? Did you ever feel as though anything you and your friends were doing was wrong? **Did anyone ever say that they were worried that the people you were friends with were bad?** [Probe for: parents, brothers / sisters / teachers] There has been a lot in the news recently about the problem of gun and knife crime. Do you think that it is true that this is a problem? Do you think that it is a bigger problem now than it has been in the past?

**Did you ever smoke cigarettes?** If so, when did you first start doing this? Where did you get them from? **Did you ever drink alcohol?** If so, how did this come about? How old were you when you first started doing this? Where did you get it from? If not, did you have friends who drank? **Did you ever take drugs?** If so, what was the first drug you took? How did this come about? Where did you get the drugs from? How old were you when you first took drugs? How often did you drink / take drugs? Where would you usually go to do this? If you did not take drugs, were you friends with people who had? **Did you ever take any harder drugs like cocaine or heroin?** If so, how did this come about? When did you first try this? Where did you get hold of it from? If you did not take harder drugs, were you friends with anyone who did? What happened to those of your friends who took drugs? For those who did drink alcohol or take drugs, did you ever worry about your drinking / taking drugs? **Did you think that there would be any bad consequences of drinking / taking drugs? Were you ever warned by anyone about the kinds of problems you can have if you drink / take drugs? Were there people who you didn't want to find out about your drug taking?** [Probe for: parents, older brothers / sisters, teachers] Were your parent's aware that you were taking drugs? If not, what would they have done if they had found out? **Was there anyone else around who would have tried to stop you from drinking / taking drugs?**

Are you still in touch with any other people that you grew up with? What sort of things are your other childhood friends doing now? **Did you have a sense of what you and your friends might end up doing back when you were growing up?**

Did any of your friends ever get into trouble with the police? [STUDENTS ONLY] **Did you personally have much contact with the police when you were growing up?** [BOTH] Did any of your friends go to a YOI or to prison? What for? What has happened to these people since? [YO ONLY] When did you first have contact with the police? How old were you? What happened? **After your first encounter with the police, was there anyone who was trying to stop things from going any further?** If so, why did things still end up going further? Did you have many dealings with the police before the incident that led to your conviction?

## **EDUCATION AND ROLE MODELS [20 MINS]**

### **TOPICS COVERED:**

- **Experiences of formal education**
- **Relationship with / guidance received from teachers**
- **Engagement with school**

- **Role models**
- **Experience of YO institute [YOs ONLY]**

**What was the school you attended like?** Do you think that your school was any better or worse than other schools? Did your school divide you into different groups depending on your ability and, if so, were you generally in the higher or lower groups? **Did you generally enjoy school?** What the best things about school for you? What were the worst things about school for you? **What were your teachers like?** Did you get on well with most of your teachers? **Did you feel as though your teachers cared about your future / what happened to you?** Did any of your teachers ever discuss your future with you? Did your teachers warn you about drinking / drugs? Did they teach you about sex? Did you struggle at school? Did you get into trouble much at school? What sort of things did you get into trouble for at school? Did you usually understand why you were in trouble? **Did you ever lose interest in school?** When was this? Why did you lose interest? Were you absent from school often? If so, were you absent throughout your school life or were you more frequently absent as you got older? What, if anything, would've kept you going to school regularly? What did you generally do on the days that you were absent? What happened when you stopped going to school? **Did your parent's know when you were absent? If so, did they try to stop you?**

**Did you look up to anyone in particular when you were younger?** [Probe: father, mother, older sibling, other family member] Can you remember what it was about that person that made you look up to them? **Do you feel as though anyone has let you down through your childhood?** [Probe for: parents, carers, schools, police, social services] Who has let you down most? **Has anyone tried to help you in ways that you found useful?** [Probe for: parents, carers, schools, police, social services, magistrates, GPs]

[YOs ONLY]

What was it like in the Young Offender Institute? Was it strict? Did you find it difficult? Was anything done the YOI to prepare you for the future? **Did you feel as though anyone tried to help you to avoid getting into trouble again in the future, either while you were in the YOI or since you have been released?** If so, who? Have people generally been sympathetic towards what has happened to you? Do you think that you deserve any sympathy? How do you think other people view you?

## **FAMILY SET-UP AND HOMELIFE EXPERIENCES [20 MINS]**

### **TOPICS COVERED:**

- **Family set-up**
- **Interaction with parents and other family members**
- **Experiences of parental care and help**
- **Parental discipline**
- **Expectations of parents**

### **QUESTIONS:**

**What was your family situation growing up?** Were your parents together? If not, were you living with a step father/mother? Do you know who both of your parents are? If your parents weren't together, did you see both your parents often? Did you ever live with any other family members or anyone else? Were you ever taken into care? If not, were you ever involved with social services? Would you say that your family / the people who looked after you were well-off when you were growing up? Where did your family get money from? Did you personally have enough money growing up? Did you get money from your parents? Did you get any money from anywhere else? Did you personally have enough money when you were growing up?

**What were your parents like?** What did they do for a living? What sort of things did your parents do outside of work? Did your parents have many friends? Did you have any brothers or sisters? How did you get along with them when you were? What are they doing now? What was your home-life like?

**Did you get on well with both of your parents?** Did you generally feel safe and secure in your home-life? Was there violence at home? Were you ever physically abused?

**How would you describe the job your parents did of raising you?** Did they do the best that they could? Is there anything that your parents didn't do when you were younger that you think they should have done? **Did your parents:**

- **Used to read to you when you were younger?**
- **Buy toys / games / books to help with your learning?**
- **Ask you how you were doing at school?**
- **Make sure that you had done your homework?**
- **Help you with homework when you needed it?**
- **Try to teach you about things like drinking or drugs? Try to teach you about sex / safe sex?**
- **Take you out to places (e.g. the zoo, park, swimming, bowling)?**
- **Encourage you to take up hobbies like playing sports?**

**Do you feel as though your parent's kept an eye on you and were making sure that you didn't get yourself into trouble?** Did your parents tell you off when you had done something wrong? **When you were in trouble with your parents, did you generally understand why you were being told off / what you had done wrong?** What, if anything, did you learn from your parents? **Did your parents ever expect you to achieve anything?** Did you or your parents expect that you would end up doing A-Levels? Did anyone else mention anything about you doing A-Levels (Probe for: teachers, careers advisors) Did your parents ever mention anything about you going to University? Did anyone else mention anything about you going to University (Probe for: teachers, careers advisors) **How responsible do you think your parents are for the way that you turned out?**

#### **LOOKING AHEAD [10 MINS]**

##### **TOPICS COVERED:**

- **Expectations of the future**
- **Nature of support required**
- **Extent of personal responsibility for events to date**

**How do you see the next few years unfolding for you?** Do you have a plan or do you think you will you go back to committing crimes? What would you like to be doing in 5 years from now? How do you plan to make this happen? Do you think that it will be easy or hard to achieve this? Do you expect that you will achieve this aim? **Apart from the effort required on your part, do you feel as though you have some support or back-up to help you along the way? If so, who from? What sort of support? Is it enough / do you need help? If you do not have any / enough support, who would you like to see doing more to help you? What sort of thing would you like this person / organisation to do?**

Do you worry about getting into trouble with the police in the future? How likely do you think it is that this will happen? What sort of thing might you be likely to get into trouble with the police for? What would need to happen in order for you to end up getting into trouble with the police? Are you mixing with the same people as before you were convicted? Are these people involved in crime? If so, do you think that you are able to avoid getting into trouble while you are still spending time with these people? If you felt like you were getting yourself into trouble now, who – if anyone - would you turn to?

**Do you feel as though the problems you have had in the past and the situation you are in now is of your own making?** Do you think that you have been dealt a particularly bad hand? **You have been in a Young Offender's Institute, but – with more than half of all young people going to university - we know that most young people do not end up getting into this sort of trouble. Why do you think this has happened to you?**