



**An impact evaluation of the Nottingham and
Nottinghamshire Violence Reduction Partnership Young
Adult Mentoring Programme 2024-2026**

Final Report

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1. Introduction

The Young Adult Mentoring programme is a novel prison-based programme targeted at 18–25-year-olds within HMP Ranby who have committed violent offences.

This report presents an overview of the key findings from the independent evaluation and offers some considerations for future commissioning.

The Young Adult Mentoring programme (YAM) was delivered within HMP Ranby which is a Category C adult male prison in Nottinghamshire with more than 1000 prisoners. HMP Ranby aims to provide a safe and educational environment where prisoners can learn new skills to support release, reduce reoffending rates and prevent further victims. Young adults make up around 11% of the Ranby population but they are overrepresented in committing acts of violence within the prison. Most young adults will return to Nottinghamshire on their release without any interventions specifically aimed at reducing violence.

Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Violence Reduction Partnership (NNVRP) funded the YAM intervention which sought to reduce incidents of violence both within the prison and in the community. The intervention aims to reduce recidivism through building improved mental health, social resilience and wellbeing thereby resulting in improved behaviour within the prison and post release.

The YAM is targeted at young adults aged 18-25 years with violent and or gang related offences ranging from common assault to murder and encompasses the use of weapons such as firearms, knives and corrosive substances like acid. Participants were identified by senior staff within HMP Ranby following assessment of suitability. The YAM aims to increase resilience, improve life skills and build support networks for participants.

In addition to the YAM the Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Violence Reduction Partnership (NNVRP) funding also support the training of Peer Mentors. This opportunity was intended to be open to anyone in the prison who was considered a suitable candidate. Participants who complete the YAM were also encouraged to also complete the Peer Mentor training.

The YAM programme was delivered by staff from Ingeus which is an external organisation with extensive experience of supporting people leaving the criminal justice system to build successful lives. Ingeus has a strong commitment to employing people with convictions and with lived experience and this was evident within the delivery of the programme.

2. Evaluation Overview

Loughborough University were appointed to independently evaluate the YAM. The purpose of the evaluation was to gather learning around the effectiveness of the

programme for all those involved which can then be utilised in future programmes to enhance the value for money for future investment.

The evaluation objectives were:

- Objective 1: Assess the outcomes, impact and effectiveness of the YAM at HMP Ranby
- Objective 2: Understand the acceptability, reach and integrity of the YAM Programme for the target population and identify any variations within the cohort sample
- Objective 3: Make recommendations based on the future model, design, and delivery of peer mentoring interventions in a prison context

The evaluation adopted a mixed-methods approach. Primary data was collated by Loughborough university through observations and qualitative interviews. Qualitative interviews were conducted with Ingeus staff (n=4) over the duration of the pilot, peer mentors (n=2) and with young adults who have completed the YAM (n=5).

The researcher also attended:

- A celebration event which was attended by participants, staff and two employees of Ingeus with lived experience.
- Delivery of two workshops (Life without a Knife) delivered as part of the YAM

Attendance at these events enabled informal conversations with staff and participants. The evaluation also draws on anonymised secondary data shared by Ingeus.

Ethical approval for the study was gained from Loughborough University Ethics Sub-Committee and also from the HMPPS National Research Committee (NRC).

3. Programme Delivery

The YAM was delivered by two Ingeus staff who are located in an office in an accommodation block at HMP Ranby. Initially there was one member of delivery staff but this increased to two staff in the Autumn of 2025. Additional contributors from Ingeus supported the early delivery of workshops and other events including the celebration event. As the YAM has become embedded within HMP Ranby the two staff members located at the prison undertake the majority of the delivery.

The programme is supported by staff from HMP Ranby, and benefits from the support of one of the governors who identifies, and risk assesses the potential participants for the YAM who must meet the following criteria:

- Between 21 and 25 in the Nottinghamshire area
- Have a violent offence
- Potentially should be 3 months prior to them being released ideally

Most participants have employment in the prison, but the governor has committed to participants in the YAM maintaining their work payment when they attend the YAM programme instead of work to ensure that are not disadvantaged by attending financially.

The initial phase of the YAM involves building rapport with new participants and this is achieved through one-to-one sessions with the new participants which is focused on understanding their needs and aspirations. After this the participant completes a Justice Star and consent form to take part. This process underpins the relationship building between the staff and the participants in the YAM.

Participants are then supported to complete activities and complete a workbook over 3 sessions which helps them to understand their emotions and to build their skills to regulate their emotions to cope with difficult and challenging situations. Workshops include 'Life without a Knife' which has been adapted to the prison context from a previously community focused version and 'Goals' which aims to be an inspirational workshop.

Some participants who complete the YAM have progressed to train as a Peer Mentors however the opportunity to become a Peer Mentor is not specifically for the young adults who have completed the YAM. Mentors who exhibit positive behaviours consistently can be paid within the prison. The progress with this element of the programme has been limited. This was due to delays in recruiting the second member of staff which limited delivery capacity. An additional challenge was identifying a meaningful role for the peer mentors within HMP Ranby due in part to there being other peer mentor roles within HMP Ranby and the wish to avoid duplication.

Delivery began in February 2025. To date five cohorts have completed the YAM with 4-6 participants per cohort. The participants for Cohort Six (n=20) were recruited in February 2026. Each member of the delivery team is responsible for ten participants within Cohort Six whilst also ensuring that Ingeus staff can work collaboratively and support each other

This approach facilitates relationship building and continuity across the programme delivery. The cohort size has grown consistently over the duration of the programme and has now reached capacity. Retention of the programme has been good but transfers to other prisons and early release has meant some participants were unable to complete the programme.

4. Key findings

4.1 Objective 1: Assess the outcomes, impact and effectiveness of the YAM at HMP Ranby

At the end of January 2026 three 41 young men had been referred to the Violence Reduction programme and of these 28 had agreed to take part. Cohort 5 was completed in February 2026 and recruitment for Cohort 6 was positive with 20 referrals being potentially recruited.

The Violence Reduction programme has been received very positively within HMP Ranby by participants and by staff. Interviewees believe that the programme is positively impacting on reducing violence within the prison and equipping those involved to resist becoming involved in violence on their release back into the community.

The main way in which the programme is impacting on violence reduction is through enabling participants to understand and regulate their emotions as summarised by one participant who stated:

“It gives you the tools to manage your own emotions.” (YAM Participant 1)

Participants in the YAM described how they were now able to manage situations in prison which would have previously resulted in a violent response in different ways. Understanding the triggers for their violence has enabled the participants to be able to regulate their emotions and prevented them from responding to these triggers with violence.

“What we cover in the sessions I've done work in different areas, Like, say, drug relapse prevention, things like that, and just with the knowledge that I'm armed with about myself from these sessions, just broadened my horizon with everything else. I seem to have a good understanding of how I'm thinking now, how I'm feeling and like I can actually take time and put. Proper responses rather than just reacting, because that's what ended me, where I was ... But you know, if you think things through, take a bit of time, you don't have to do them things. You've got to put the work in to understand these things. But I think this, course really gives people the opportunity genuinely.” (YAM Participant 1)

Participants reported that they had accessed other benefits because they are better able to control their behaviour. As a result, they can in build better relationships with staff and peers therefore reducing the confrontation and the triggers they were exposed to.

“I've learned to bite my tongue a lot more. I don't rise up to comments or someone says something but it's not too serious I'm just laughing and ... to be honest it just feel a lot better.” (YAM Participant 3)

Additionally, some participants had benefited from unanticipated outcomes including enhanced status and better accommodation because of demonstrating their improved behaviours. The successful engagement in the programme has supported parole hearing outcomes.

“It's made my jail a bit easier now ... so when like when I first started doing the course I was always on basic and now I've got understand it. The only reason why I came from standard to basic is refusing to go to work OK so my bad behaviour stopped since doing this course whereas before I was kind of up and down.” (YAM Participant 4)

The participants who were interviewed highly valued the YAM and believed that they had gained knowledge and skills that would help them to regulate their emotions and behaviours in the future and as a result they are now able to view a future that is different from their past as illustrated by one participant who stated:

“For me it's made everything change. How I live my day-to-day life in here. It's all heavily based around the future that when I first arrived at prison I didn't think I had. But now I'm confident I know what I'm doing when I get out of prison. I know what I'm not going to do which is just as important. I'm confident I'm going to stay on track because I want that life for myself and for others.” (YAM Participant 1)

“Once you put work like this into yourself, you know, you can take it out there. You're armed with this knowledge now. So I will be able to use these type of thought patterns and processes in the rest of my life, and I definitely will, because I'm liking how it's changing my life already.” (YAM Participant 1)

Primary desistance refers to a period of nonoffending whilst secondary desistance refers to a change in self-identity where the person no longer thinks of themselves as an offender. The changes described by the participants align with these understandings of desistance processes where it is argued that "To truly desist from crime, according to the narrative perspective, a person needs to restructure his or her understanding of self" (Maruna, 1999: 10). The consideration of a different future from the past is also important within desistance processes where offenders start to stop seeing themselves as defined only by their criminality. As Vaughan (2007) states "a pre-requisite of change, is that the agent is at least willing to consider different options". The interviews revealed that participants were able to reflect on their previous actions and recognise the impact split

second decisions made. They described how the future could be different for them because they can manage their emotions and not react in the moment:

“So, it makes me think things through. For the starters, I definitely like I say, what then what landed me in prison was a split-second decision. There was no, I didn't sit and plan what I was going to do. It just happened. And there's been a few similar scenarios in my life where I've made split second decisions, and it's completely set my life on a roller coaster, yeah, that I've had to deal with for years and years after this, course, definitely deals you to definitely helps you to realize what your body and your emotions are about to do, and put a bit of caution in front of it, and a bit of rational thinking towards it. Evaluate the situation a little bit.” (YAM Participant 1)

“The assessment was going to be hurt, not just you other people, feelings, emotions. And you learn to take a step back in the situation and, like I say, evaluate the pros and cons, and then respond properly. And nine times out of 10, if you do it like that, it will be okay, but if you react instantly, which is what most of us hardwired, young people are prone to doing, then nine times out of 10, it sends life on a roller coaster. So it gives you the tools to manage your own emotions and feelings a little bit better, bit more responsibly. Yeah, and that's in here and outside them. Yeah, that you've changed.” (YAM Participant 3)

“I mean, when you're when you're involved in that type of lifestyle, you do just get completely wrapped up in it, and you think there's nothing else other than money and drugs and that lifestyle, but there's a whole world out there. Go and explore. You can do things, meet new people, experience new things, and if you're living that lifestyle, it's almost never gonna happen. Circle. You're always on the run, you're always looking over your shoulder. Don't know who you can trust, who wants to live like that? ... I'm genuinely thinking there's a better life out there for me.” (YAM Participant 1)

Delivery and prison staff reported positive changes in behaviours being evident in the participants that complete the programme. These improvements include participants showing signs of improved mental and physical health and reduced drug use. Improved behaviours were also evident for most participants, and they noted that where incidents do occur these do not escalate to the same level as they may have done previously. This is important because it supports the process of ‘tertiary desistance’ which involves the recognition by others that one has changed and the development of a sense of belonging (McNeill, 2016). Participants in the YAM were able to identify changes in the ways in which they were viewed by staff and family members as these quotes illustrate:

“I feel like I've matured heavily. I know some of the prison officers, if you ask them what I was like before I've done all this. Yeah, they'd say I was a very different person. It's nice to know.” (YAM Participant 1)

“Most definitely even my mom said she could see a massive change in that just like not me getting stressed out that used to be a proper stress head and now I just can just breathe. I can see I am managing my emotions. It's about 10 times better... I can manage my emotions.” (YAM Participant 3)

4.2 Objective 2: Understand the acceptability, reach and integrity of the YAM Programme for the target population and identify any variations within the cohort sample

All of the participants interviewed spoke very positively about their experiences of the YAM. The acceptability of the course is demonstrated by the participants' enthusiasm for recommending the YAM to others:

“I could have an opportunity to speak to every sort of younger male as they come through the door into prison, I would this would be one of the first things I put down in front of them, because this, this is an impactful course, and it helps people.” (YAM Participant 1)

The funded programme is referred to as the Violence Reduction programme by prisoners. Instead of seeing this language in a potentially negative light which stigmatises the participants they speak positively about being involved in a programme which specifically aims to reduce violence. Participants stated that the dedication, enthusiasm and delivery style of the staff contributed significantly to the acceptability of the programme:

“Obviously, they're really passionate about this course I really really you know it matters to them so in terms of the way that we've worked with Katie is that different or the same time you work with other people here... I've refused course after course after course I've been in jail and recalled ... I could have gone after six months right but I refused Building Better Choices, refused Victim Awareness, refused Drug Awareness. The only course I've agreed to do is the Violence Reduction course” (Participant 4)

Another important element which enhanced the acceptability of the YAM was its focus on the individual participants needs and aspirations as a starting point:

“ I went to a few courses and I felt like there was brainwashing to think a certain type of way...They call it highly intensive violence reduction course OK so it's high intensity ... you gotta tell them everything you know and I feel like it was it was kind of pressurizing. But when I came to this and I was asked what can I do for you yeah I've never been asked that before really. What can I do for you? What do you need.?” (YAM Participant 4)

This participant felt strongly that most courses he had previously been exposed to in prison were based on a professional telling participants what to do based on theory. This approach did not land well because it ignored the realities of the lived experience of the participants. An example given was a drug awareness course which was delivered by someone who had never been exposed to drugs and whose expectation was the participants should stop engaging with drugs purely on moral grounds. The participant was frustrated by being told what to do rather than being supported in the process of change. He felt the YAM was different because it empowered him to make better choices rather than ignoring his agency in this process.

“Most of them didn't have their life experiences ... not the same things that most of us come from. She came from the same place and made something made something of herself. Came out the other side and built a career... I feel like all these other courses ... they're just normal people ... they're not criminals ... they haven't been through what we have. They give you a different energy but I feel like when someone's come from the same place and has been through the same thing and has the same problems and yet they have turned out alright so I need to listen to this person.” (YAM Participant 4)

The increase in cohort size demonstrates the acceptability and growing reach of the programme.

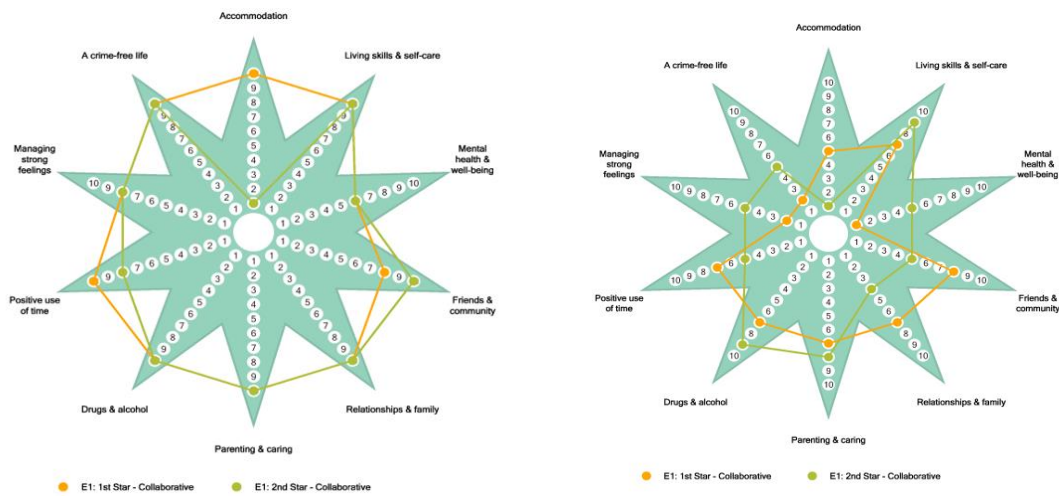
“I'd say just making it a bit more accessible to people when when they first come into jail, especially because, like I said, it took me best part of a year and a half before I started getting into all this, all these things that are actually helping me and for my future. But if we make it accessible for people as soon as they come into prison, you know, especially in the induction stages, yeah, identify who needs the support and get them on with it straight away, like that. I thought I feel like that. I'd help a lot of people. Yeah, they won't necessarily have to go through that rough patch at the beginning.” (YAM Participant 1)

The delivery team are working with prison staff to implement the approach described by this participant. The aspiration is that in the future peer mentors will be involved in the induction stage to support young new arrivals and to promote the Violence Reduction programme to them.

The participants in the Violence Reduction programme were recruited based on their age (18-24), the nature of their offence (violent) and the location they were due to be released to (Nottingham). Many of the young men had experienced adverse childhood experiences (ACES) and been excluded from school. The prevalence of neurodiversity was high amongst the cohort as was poor mental health. Despite sharing these similar characteristics there were also inevitably variations amongst the participants which resulted in them experiencing different personal journeys through their experiences.

As noted previously Justice Stars were completed with the participants in the early stages of the programme (Yellow line) as a means of assessing their reflections on outcomes that are associated with supporting people in the criminal justice system to build lives that are crime free. These outcomes include accommodation, mental health and wellbeing, drugs and alcohol and managing strong feelings. The Justice Stars were also completed by participants at the end of the programme (Green line) and the stars therefore provide an insight into changes that have occurred between the two time points based on the participants own ratings and reflection. Figure 1 shows two very different start and end points for two different participants in the YAM.

Figure 1: Start and End of Programme Justice Stars – Abdul and Zac



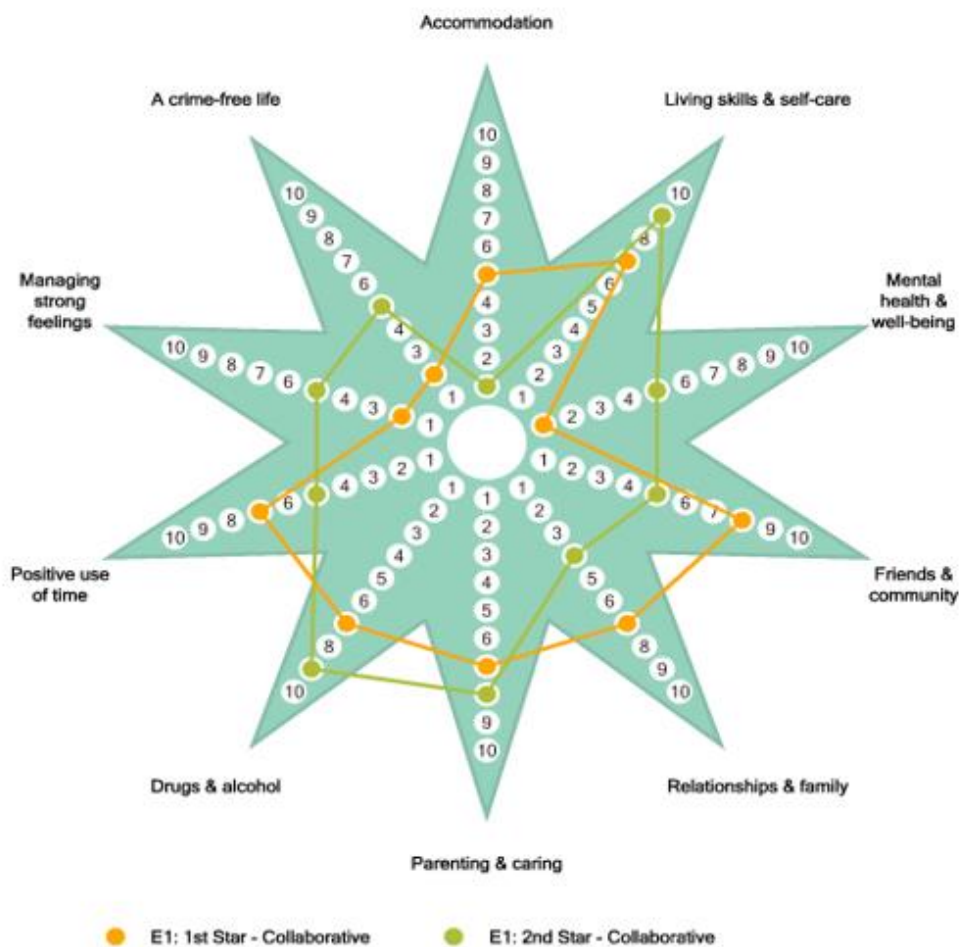
The strength of the YAM lies in the programme’s ability to be strengths-based and focused on individual journeys. Whilst all the participants reported positive outcomes their start and end points varied as demonstrated by the Justice Stars. A case study example follows which illustrates how the Justice Stars are unique and reflect individual journeys.

Justice STAR – Case Study Example Joe

Start of Programme STAR

The first Justice Star identified that accommodation was an issue (Score = 5/10) for Joe. Joe had previously lived independently but was unsure where he would go post release and some of this uncertainty was due to a restraining order being in place. In addition to a range of mental health conditions (Bi-polar, PTSD) his health and wellbeing score was impacted by changes in medication and by not being allowed to contact his mum. Whilst he scored his Friends and Community as an 8 initially, he stated he didn't know many people not connected to crime and this was a problem for him. Managing his feelings and Crime free life were both ranked 2 at the start of the programme. He was aware that not being able to manage his feelings had resulted in violence. He was concerned that living a crime free life would depend on moving away from his estate and away from the people he was involved with previously. He also expressed wanting to do better for his young daughter.

Figure 1: Start and End of Programme Justice Star - Joe



End of Programme STAR

The end of programme star indicated improvements in six dimensions including his mental health and well-being, managing strong feelings and a crime free life. His accommodation score decreased from 5 to 1 due to discovering he no longer had access to his flat. This uncertainty was causing him significant anxiety. Slight decreases in scores were also recorded for Relationships and Family, Friends and Community and Positive use of time. The latter score was due in part to moving cell.

Concerns about accommodation on release were raised by participants. Most of the participants were keen not to return to the places where they committed their offences because they believed their aspirations for desistance were jeopardised by this. An interviewee who was close to release commented that he has five nights in a hotel arranged for his release but beyond this he was unclear what would happen. This challenge is exacerbated by the nature of their offences being for violence which is acknowledged by the participants.

4.2 Objective 3: Make recommendations based on the future model, design, and delivery of peer mentoring interventions in a prison context

Delivery Challenges

Several challenges exist in attempting to deliver a transformational educational programme within the prison context. These issues include:

- Low levels of mental health and low motivation are prevalent within the prison cohort. The needs of the prison regime also impact delivery and therefore the delivery team have been flexible in their approach to ensure that participants complete the programme.
- The lack of accreditation for the programme is a disincentive for some eligible participants, but this may be a benefit because those who take part have more authentic reasons to be involved.
- The specificity of the cohort inclusion criteria limited recruitment initially but the small cohort size is considered to have been effective.

- The fluidity of the prison population makes impact hard to assess in the longer term as participants can move prison or get released.
- For participants with longer sentences there may be a tendency to regress into older patterns of behaviour when frustrations are experienced within the prison environment or when there are issues with friends and family outside of the prison.

Young Adult First Approach

Phillips et al. (2025) recently used qualitative data from a process evaluation of the Newham Youth-to-Adulthood (Y2A) Hub the study to advocate for “young adult first” probation practice. The paper identifies several issues which increase young adults’ vulnerability to criminalisation which include:

- neuromaturation (ongoing development of consequential thinking, self-regulation, appraisal of risk),
- identity formation (instability in work, relationships, social roles),
- structural constraints (precarious employment, insecure housing, reduced welfare entitlements), and
- cumulative adversity (higher rates of trauma, racialisation, and social exclusion).

The authors argue that young adulthood (18–25) constitutes a developmentally and socio-structurally distinct life stage and therefore requires a differentiated supervisory model within probation practice. The authors propose an adaptation of the Youth Justice Board’s “child first” ABCD framework. The Y2A Hub provides a physically distinct, multidisciplinary space incorporating probation staff, mental health services, substance misuse support, speech and language therapy, employment support, mentoring, and women’s services. Both staff and young adults perceived this environment as more supportive, less punitive, and more responsive than mainstream adult probation.

The study adapted the child-first ABCD framework for young adults as summarised in Figure 3.

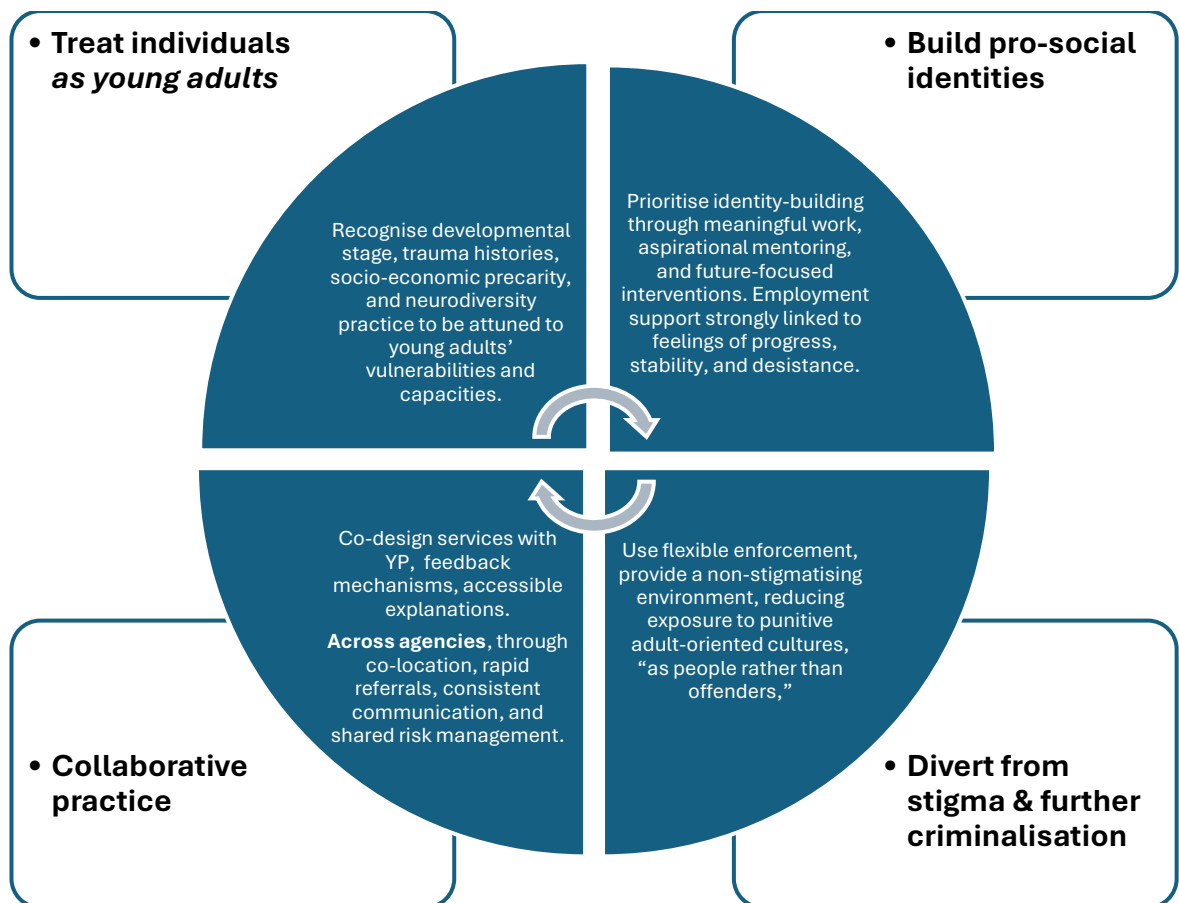


Figure 3: ABCD model adapted for young adults' probation services (Phillips et al. 2025).

This model resonates with the way in which the YAM supported participants within HMP Ranby. The model clarifies why the YAM has been effective for those involved as outlined below.

A) Treat Individuals as Young Adults

Those involved with delivering the YAM are committed to ensuring that the programme reaches and engages young men who have committed violent offences who they believe will benefit from the programme. In recruiting participants, the programme lead is ambitious in who is recruited to the programme and in her aspirations to support the young men to develop knowledge and understanding that will enable them to manage their emotions and behaviours to reduce their risk of committing violence:

"I tend to want the most violent young adult ... because I know that once I start working with them that their attitude changes. The whole point is just to have more respect ... they don't understand their emotions ... the workbook is just explaining emotions and explaining that they can control their own emotions in prison, in custody. And you know, teaching them breathing exercises and grounding

techniques ... And it's just to let them be more in control of their own life.”
(Programme Lead)

The young men who participated in the YAM had all experienced significant trauma as young people and all had experienced violence firsthand on a regular basis:

“I was young, I was homeless, and I needed, I needed money. Basically, started with, like, petty dealing and that. And then, yeah, I just got involved in, there's not necessarily gangs where I'm from, but group, male criminal activity. I did get involved in a lot of that. So, I think situations for certain people make them do certain things out of desperation, and that's definitely what made me get into crime. And before I knew it, it gone on for 10 plus years, and now I'm an experienced criminal, and it's just situations that you don't necessarily want to be in, and you can try and look for the easiest escape, the quickest escape, it usually ends up being crime.” (YAM Participant 1)

The programme delivery recognises these prior experiences alongside the unique vulnerabilities the participants face as young adults within the secure estate. The staff adopt a personalised approach to the programme which recognises the complexities of participants needs and aspirations. The YAM programme is delivered in a way that builds from one-to-one support through to group sessions once a relationship has been established. The interviews with participants indicate that prior to committing the offences they were imprisoned for the participants had lived difficult lives.

“I went to a special school ... so really my school was kind of chaotic because I got the impression you didn't go to school to work right so even in even in primary school I didn't go to school to learn maths English science and when I went to school to have fun with my friends. It's also us versus the teachers and I feel like when I first came to prison, I related the kind of about to school because you know it was versus the officers... I kind of felt like they were against me” (YAM Participant 4)

All had been excluded from school and found themselves with lots of time on their hands and they had drifted into criminal activities which became more serious over time. Participants suggested that prison was providing them with opportunities that were not available to them when they were young and the lack of opportunity had contributed to their criminality and violent offending.

“I'd never have had these opportunities if I didn't come to prison.”

“If the support that this, this type of course gives people like me, if that was more open to more open society as well, I think definitely people in that young age bracket as well, if you can get to them before they make the really bad, bad

mistakes. Yeah, then hopefully there'll be a lot less people where I am right now. ... I mean, for some people, it can be as young as like 12 and 13, but I'd say they're not, they're not really going to be committing serious, serious crime at that point, but there can definitely be signs of people going that way. Yeah, I'd say when the major crime starts happening, that's usually 16-17, when people leave school and, you know, they've got a bit of a routine with school, but when, soon as that's took away from them, it's done, a lot of people don't really know what to do with it at that time, which I think, me personally, that was I was a big one for me. Yeah, I got kicked out in the halfway through the last year, misbehaving a bit.”
(YAM Participant 4)

The programme has been built on the expertise and experience of Ingeus but the programme also evolved and adapted over time to better meet the needs of the participants and in response to the challenges of delivering a programme within the prison context. Workshops that were previously delivered successfully in community settings were utilised within this programme but the content and means of delivery have been refined as they have been tried and tested within the prison. Another change that has been implemented was in response to issues of neurodiversity and participants short attention spans where the original content in the workbook has become more focused and avoids repetition.

B) Build Pro-Social Identities

The celebration event for the YAM included presentations from two men who shared their life stories with the audience. They described their journeys into and out of crime and these were powerful in demonstrating that offenders can achieve fulfilling and rewarding lives that are crime free. They did not oversimplify or avoid the challenges that exist in achieving this but the participants were inspired by the hope these accounts.

The participants in the YAM all recognised that the course was timely because of they were no longer young people but instead they were young adults and some were also parents and this provided a strong motivation to change.

“I'd say it's a necessity right ... when you reach a certain age ... When you're a kid you wanna smash your Xbox and you can kind of ... but if you're still doing that at 23 /24 this is a serious problem in your life .. I can't say I'm not proud to change my ways but I feel like it was more like I had to yeah it's maturity ...” (Participant 4)

“There's definitely an element of physically cannot do that anymore. I physically cannot do that because I will probably end up dead or back here, for example. But I think I genuinely especially now, now that I've got so far of all this, like I do, I really distance myself from more than things on the landing, because it is in jail,

is all around you, drugs, violence, all of it is there. But I do definitely distance myself away from that, and I don't think that's just because I think I'm gonna die or end up back in jail. I think that's because I want a better life, and I know there is a better type of life now that I've been doing these type things, I want to surround myself with people that want the best for me and want good lives for their selves, really, because it might seem like a lavish lifestyle when there's money and drugs and all that. But it's really not.” (YAM Participant 1)

The participants all described how through the course they had changed their perceptions of the actions that resulted in them being imprisoned. Most spoke about how they wanted to use their experiences to help prevent others from becoming involved in similar criminal behaviours:

“The main thing for me is having the opportunity to stop other people in similar scenarios to what I was in before I come to prison, from making the same stupid mistakes that I have done, which ultimately have ended me here. If I can make other young people see that this is not exactly the way. I mean, there is another way you haven't got to get involved in that type of lifestyle and recognize when their lives are going down them type of paths, and stop it, intercept it, and change the direction.” (YAM Participant 1)

“When I get out of jail I wanna work with those younger children... I've had lived experience and certain things like I can talk to you know in certain areas and give them a bit of real-life advice .” (YAM Participant 4)

“I've had a kid now and that's why I changed my kid ... I've been in situations where I don't really wanna see a kid in that situation ... 15-year-olds, 16 yeah a lot of them are just misguided or lost and ready to be manipulated. It just happened to me as a 15-year-old doing things and making myself a little bit special ... but you don't gain nothing like the money it's not worth it. When you go to jail no one reaches out to you ... It's definitely not worth it so anything I can do to help someone younger than you that's what I'm trying to do when I get out.” (YAM Participant 3)

C) Collaborative Practice

Collaborative practice has been instrumental in the success of the YAM. The location of delivery staff within the prison has been important ensuring the effectiveness of the programme. Being in the prison facilitates the building of relationships with both staff and participants and underpins the flexible approach that is needed. The programme lead is also able to advocate for participants within the prison when issues arise which supports their engagement with, and commitment to, the YAM programme and to maintaining positive behaviours beyond completion.

The involvement of Ingeus also provides participants with support on release to rebuild their lives including financial support advice. It also provides the possibility that mentors may be able to secure additional mentoring opportunities which lead to paid work through Ingeus after release.

D) Divert from stigma and further criminalisation

The commitment of the delivery partner Ingeus to employing people with lived experience who have gone on to live stable and productive lives is a significant element in the success of this programme. Previous research shows that allowing young people in despair to see a future for themselves reduces anxiety and anger and generates hope (Maruna, 2001) which are key components within desistance journeys.

“I feel like lived experience is crucial for this. Because I mean, as much as anybody can tell, you've been exposed, you share a similar type of lifestyle with somebody, and you know, they can't look at you and think, Well, what does he know? No, exactly, I genuinely do know me. I've been there. I've been to the worst of the worst. I've been in prison. I've been taking all these nasty algo drugs. I've done all that. But look where I am. Yeah, and that is powerful to see that change in front of you. So, yeah, yeah, dead, right? And it's great, isn't it, that you actually have people saying things can be different. Things were different, and we can actually get you help you get a job” (YAM Participant 1)

The YAM is promoted as a Violence Reduction programme and this is viewed positively by participants. Completion of the course is associated with positive pro-social identity change. The aspirations of the participants to help prevent others from offending are indicative of momentum towards crime free lives.

Mentoring Young Adults

Mentoring is often considered as a useful intervention to work with young people to prevent and reduce youth offending within community settings. Mentoring offers the potential to engage with cohorts who would not choose to engage in other programmes and to build skills and confidence to manage conflict, peer pressure and to make the right choices (Big Lottery Fund, 2018). Mentoring can support young people to reflect and think critically about their futures and provide appropriate professional support which is important for young people at a ‘critical moment’ such as taking a pathway out of gang membership (Thompson, 2019). Social support as a protective factor for young people

leaving a gang includes satisfying the need for esteem, identity, belonging and companionship as well as providing advice and guidance (Cullen, 1994). Allowing young people in despair to see a future for themselves which reduces anxiety and anger and generates hope (Maruna, 2001). Mentoring offers the potential to contribute to desistance from youth offending especially if it is part of a wider strategy and supplemented by other interventions (Bouffard & Bergseth, 2008). When mentoring is done well, it is a promising intervention (Rhodes, 2008) but if a mentoring programme is not delivered effectively, it can also result in 'negative effects' or 'no effect' (Blechman et al., 2000). Effective mentoring requires the mentee to be open to engaging in new relationships (Spencer et al., 2019) and ideally provide individualised programmes based on a young person's own strengths and goals are more promising (Hazel & Bateman, 2020).

Peer mentors account for 90% of criminal justice mentors in parts of England (Willoughby et al., 2013). Peer mentoring is 'strengths-based' practice which can reposition criminalised people as 'community assets to be utilized rather than liabilities to be supervised' (Burnett and Maruna, 2006: 84). Peer workers maybe seen as more credible because they have experienced first-hand many of the same problems and can relate to the challenges of life after prison (Princes Trust, 2012; Boyce et al., 2009). Drawing on the relatable lived experiences offered by peer mentors can present meaningful personalised bonding opportunities, and can potentially bridge gaps within existing service provision (Buck, 2021).

However, many challenges exist including difficulties with mentoring relationships, managing the demands on mentors and a lack of skills within challenging and punitive contexts (Buck, 2021). Whilst in England and Wales mentoring and peer mentoring have become prominent, potentially cost-effective approaches within justice and drug treatment policy, as well as within their individual and combined settings, there is a weak evidence-base of their efficacy in supporting beneficial desistance and recovery outcomes (Wincup, 2019). To strengthen the evidence-base Wincup (2018) notes a principle concern being the need for a better conceptualisation of mentoring within justice and drug treatment settings. Wincup argues for "theorising around desistance" to enable better understanding around "the mechanisms" through which mentoring can be effective and through which types of impact may be identified for measurement (2018, p. 43).

Wincup proposes use of the "Good Lives Model" (GLM) (2018, p. 43) which is a strengths-based approach. Achieving a 'good life' is based on the assumption that humans seek "*primary* goods ... life; knowledge; excellence in work, play and agency; inner peace; relatedness; community; spirituality; pleasure and creativity ... and *secondary* or *instrumental* goods ... through work or relationships" (Wincup, 2018, p. 43). As an approach to mentoring, mentees develop through the GLM process an individualised

‘good lives’ plan, and through which they identify their most important outcomes, rather than having a pre-defined framework directing the process (Wincup, 2018, p. 44). This bespoke approach offers less opportunity for shared measurement outcomes which Wincup (2018) identifies as a feature often required of interventions.

Lessons for Future Commissioning

1. Strategic Support for the programme within the prison

The successful implementation of the programme to date has been reliant on the strategic support of staff within the prison. The strategic support offered by the governor has been vital in ensuring that the programme successfully recruits the targeted participants and that they are incentivised to attend. The insight of the governor is also vital in ensuring that prisoners do not mix with other prisoners where there are pre-existing issues which raise the risk of violent interactions. The strategic support is further demonstrated by the office space provided for Ingeus staff within the prison and other resources.

It is recommended that commissioners should:

- Ensure that programmes delivered within prison that aim to reduce violence have the strategic commitment of the prison governors to ensure necessary the resources area available and that the appropriate participants are recruited to the programme

2. Responsive delivery which is adapted to the context

This programme seeks to address a significant challenge within the prison, and it is therefore ambitious in its aim. Whilst the programme was initially based on pre-existing knowledge and resources that have been successful in the community the programme has evolved to ensure that it works within the unique context and meets the needs and expectations of participants. The programme lead has been proactive in addressing any challenges and makes changes to continue to improve the programme experience.

It is recommended that commissioners should:

- Recognise the time and resources needed to develop and establish a complex programme within the prison context and ensure that there are sufficient time and resource to do adapt the programme in the early stages

3. Early intervention

The young adult participants in the YAM all described the complex challenges they faced earlier in their lives and their exclusion from school and how this had contributed to them becoming involved in crime and violence. Having completed the YAM they were all keen to help prevent others from following similar pathways.

It is recommended that commissioners should:

- Consider how serious youth violence prevention efforts within the community can reach the young people who are at a high risk of committing violence offences

when they are not engaged in any positive activities (e.g. school, sport, community projects)

- Consider ways in which participants in the YAM could potentially contribute to serious youth violence prevention efforts within the community

4. Organisations which value lived experience

An asset within the delivery of the programme is the commitment to and visibility of those with lived experience being able to build stable and positive lives after being in prison. These stories are important in creating the ethos of the programme and in fostering aspirations and hope.

It is recommended that commissioners should:

- Recognise the value and possibilities that exist when those with lived experience can share their journeys with those in prison in ways that are authentic and realistic about the challenges that are associated with these journeys
- Consider how to ensure that the commissioning of prison-based programmes benefits from the input of those with lived experience

5. Recognise the relevance of Young Adult First approaches to violence reduction

The implementation of the YAM aligns with a Young Adult First approach which recognises the particular vulnerabilities of young adults, builds Pro-Social identities, is Collaborative and which seeks to divert participants from stigma & further criminalisation. This approach recognises young adults' agency in desistance processes which is valued by those engaging in the change process.

It is recommended that commissioners should:

- Recognise the value of Young Adult First approaches to reduce violence and offending
- Prioritise approaches are authentic and responsive to individual needs and aspirations
- Recognise the importance of agency in desistance journeys

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