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# Young offenders' trauma on release from custody

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# Beyond

YOUTH CUSTODY

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## Paper takes data from research over 15 years:

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- Evaluation of Medway Secure Training Centre (1998-2000)
- Assessment of the Detention and Training Order (2000-2002)
- Young offenders' experiences of Criminal Justice (2000-2002)
- Evaluation of RESET resettlement programme (2005-2007)
- Resettlement needs of girls in custody (2011-2013)



- Data from qualitative depth interviews with young people (and parents)
- Young people aged 12 to 17

## Mixed experiences of release

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- Release process is easy for some:

*I reckon it was easy. I just come out and everything is the same, not the same but over the two days everything felt the same. It was like I had never gone to prison*

John, 17

- But 'two days' to feel the same gives hints at the transition process and initial issues >



## Dream of getting out, no anticipation of disorientation

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- Key words repeated in interviews:

*mad, buzzing, strange, weird*

*Big thing innit, just getting let out. And then I felt weird for a bit.... I couldn't speak. It was weird...I knew I'd be happy and everything, but I didn't know it was going to feel like that.*

Ella, 17

*Weird, It done my head in*

Tony, 14

*I knew it was gonna be a bit weird but I didn't think...I dunno. I think it just hit me to be honest, I dunno.*

Sasha, 17

# Trauma effects felt by young people

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- Physical stress symptoms

*When my mum came and picked me up from the prison, when I came out and I was sitting in the car, I felt sick. I was shaking cos I didn't know what to do and that.*

Ella, 17



## Trauma effects felt by young people

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- Overwhelmed psychological anxiety

*I couldn't handle it, like the first day I couldn't handle being out of prison. I just couldn't stop crying and felt depressed all the time.*

Sasha, 17

*I was really scared when I am out. I was all scared cos I thought everyone was looking at me. I felt scared. I walked around town, and I thought everyone was just ataring at me, but they weren't it was just me.*

Peter, 17

# Trauma effects felt by young people

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- Quiet and withdrawn

*I came out and it was weird. I could hardly talk for about a week*

Ben, 17

*He was very withdrawn when he first came out. He didn't want to go anywhere or anything. He was very withdrawn. He is back [to himself] now.*

*Yes, he is speaking now and he does go out with his friends.*

Grandparent



## Trauma effects felt by young people

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- Agoraphobic symptoms

*Just indoors with all my family and friends, I didn't go out*

Sasha, 17

*I just weren't ready to go out. I felt weird*

Ella, 17 (did not leave the house for 10 days)

## Trauma effects felt by young people

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- Agoraphobic symptoms – neighbourhood felt alien and unfamiliar

*I didn't really want to go out. I wasn't used to being there. I had to start again getting used to the area.*

Ben, 17

- Exacerbated by fear of being returned to custody:

*I was scared of getting in trouble and getting taken back...As long as I was in the house, I wouldn't mind.*

Ella, 17

- Contrasted with others who react with binge on life or binge on antisocial behaviour

## Trauma effects felt by young people

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- Physical tiredness [stress or physical readjustment?]

*I just used to get right tired, cos inside you used to like walk around there not doing much really*

Gary, 14

*And walking as well, that was mad, walking. My legs felt like spaghetti.*

Martin, 16

## What was stressful about the experience?

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- Disorientated and scared

*Lost, I think I was. I didn't know where I was going to go or what. I just came out of there. It was like my life had just stopped and swung back round and kicked me.*

Martin, 16

*I walked into the shop, and I didn't know what I wanted*

Peter, 17

*I came out and I was scared. I didn't know what to do, I didn't know where to go. I kept sitting down. I was like seeing cars going past and I was like, "Can't believe I'm out"*

Jenny, 16

## What was stressful about the experience?

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- Pace of life literally and perception

*I came home and everything was faster, cos everything's slow down there [in custody]. You don't really do owt do you? So you come out and everyone's just rushing about as normal and ... so it takes you a while to keep up and carry back on.*

Gary, 14

*Everyone rushing about. Everyone is mad. You are used to sitting down all day.*

Martin, 16



## What was stressful about the experience?

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- The normal was suddenly unfamiliar – destabilised

*I dunno, I was shocked really....happy to get out, yeah...[but] yeah, it felt weird. Like seeing a bus and everything, it felt weird*

Sasha, 17

*I was walking into shops and I was thinking, “Oh my gosh”, cos I didn’t see a shop [inside]. I didn’t actually like, all I saw was pure girls. I didn’t see like cars or food shops and that.*

Jenny, 16

## What was stressful about the experience?

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- Adapting to a world that's moved on

*There's new owners in the shops and all that. It was a bit strange, but I've got used to it now*

Steve, 17

- Eg thinking been 'robbed' when new coin in change (Barry, 14)

## What was stressful about the experience?

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- Learning to interact again – especially with family and friends

*I didn't know what to say to mum and dad when I came out. And I didn't know what to say to my friends. I like never talked to hardly anyone. I just kept myself to myself.*

Peter, 17

*I was in the bedroom with my cousin celebrating that I'd just come out. And usually, like me and my cousin chat away and everything but in the bedroom I was just looking and smiling and embarrassed, going all red and everything. Going all red. I didn't want to talk to them. She started talking to me and I was, "Yeah yeah". I just didn't know what to say. It is a weird experience, a really weird experience.*

Ben, 17

## What was stressful about the experience?

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- Suggestion of difficulty with the opposite sex after single sex institution?

*It was strange seeing boys walking past me. It was strange seeing boys walking past me. People was coming up to me: "How are you? And I weren't really relating to them.*

Jenny, 16



## What was stressful about the experience?

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- Lack of regulation like eating and sleeping patterns

*Just my sleeping pattern. [In custody], I wake up in the morning and make the bed and then eat my breakfast for a certain time. But it's just getting back into a sleeping pattern, waking up at 2.30 in the afternoon again.*

Sean, 16

- Unable to cope with taking initiative or act independently



## Negative support

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- Pressure of being focus of attention when interactions are stressful

*Cos everything was going too fast. Like people, all my family were coming over, get all this birthday stuff and....I dunno, like every time I see someone, it was like “Oh how was prison?” “How was this, how was that?” and yeah, it was just the same thing over and over.*

Sasha, 17

# Conclusions

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- Release from prison is traumatic for young people, not so recognised by literature
- Disorienting and scary experience
- Physical and psychological symptoms of stress
- Trauma not anticipated, nor prepared for
- Even young people with high levels of support
- Supporters can make matters worse

## Recommendations

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- Service providers should acknowledge and prepare for traumatic nature of release
- All young people should be met at the gate by someone they have good relationship with
- Structured timetable for initial period, discussed in advance
- Greater use of Release on Temporary Licence
- Additional shorter ROTL

*If just for an hour, just like walking around (Barry, 14)*

- Advice to young people and family for graduated exposure and acclimatisation
- More alone time with family in different environments before release
- Consider physical preparation for release as well

# Beyond YOUTH CUSTODY

Bateman T, Hazel N and Wright S (2013) *Resettlement of young people leaving custody: Lessons from the literature* London: Beyond Youth Custody/Nacro

(<http://www.beyondyouthcustody.net/resources/publications/lessons-from-the-literature/>)