

This assignment contains three specific sections each pertaining to the needs of a hypothetical young offender within the criminal justice system, drawing upon the AssetPlus framework in order to explore the topic of youth justice. Firstly, in the assignment is a comprehensive needs report detailing a young person and their circumstances. This will enable criminal justice practitioners, advocates and agencies to maintain a clear picture of a child or young person's historical and current situation. The report will identify any risks, assess barriers to ongoing needs and support the identification of strengths and goals that a young person may possess to foster resilience and autonomy and reduce the chances of recidivism.

Having identified the key actions necessary, the second section will establish resources and strategies in response to the youth, the offence and any victim of unlawful behaviour, briefly critiquing the role of restorative justice practice. This section will also identify specific support services necessary and appropriate to the reduction of reoffending, anti-social behaviour, and social exclusion. Finally, section three will focus on the role of an independent professional advocate when supporting a young offender and will briefly analyse the efficacy of the AssetPlus model in terms of youth offending. The assignment will then conclude with justifying the necessity of an advocate in order to facilitate a more child-centred approach in addition to models defined by AssetPlus.

The young person featured in the assignment is a fictional 15-year-old female named Charlotte, who has received a six-month referral order from the local magistrate court after pleading guilty to assaulting her teacher at school. It is known that Charlotte, whilst under the influence of alcohol, repeatedly struck her maths teachers back with a chair. Mr Jones has been unable to return to work due to his injuries and it is hoped by the youth justice panel that by utilising restorative justice approaches, alongside supportive advocacy, service intervention and educational programmes, Charlotte can not only realise the consequences of her actions but be diverted away from recidivism.

Part 1 Report

Full name Charlotte Banks

Preferred Name Charlie

Gender	Female
Address	17 Cherry Tree Lane, Carmarthen. SA96 4JA. (Family Home).
Contact Number	078158148277
Date of Birth	Oct 30 th , 2005
Age	15
Parent or Carer	Julie Maxwell 17 Cherry Tree Lane Carmarthen. SA96 4JA. 073117832964
Siblings	4 brothers, 1 younger 3 older.
School	Cherry Tree High
Ethnicity	White British
Offence	Actual Bodily Harm
Sentencing Court	Cherry Tree
Plea Entered	Guilty
Sentence	Referral Order Supervised by Cherry Tree Youth Offender Team.
Date Order Made	8 th March 2021.
Length of Order	6 Months
Previous Offences	None

Anti-social Behaviour	Known to consume alcohol in public places such as parks and on school grounds. Alcohol has been confiscated by officers and by school staff. Known to sleep rough.
Known Risks	Lives with known offenders. Drugs and Alcohol readily available at home. Anger escalation problems exasperated by alcohol.
Risk to Self.	Misusing alcohol, exposure to drug growth, use and distribution. Creating vulnerability by rough sleeping. Reoffending. No known history of self-harm.
Risk to Others	Risk of further violence. Potential coercion to supply drugs and alcohol within the school. Drug and alcohol transactions amongst peer group.
Risk to Property	None Identified.
Hobbies/Interests	Charlotte is known to appreciate reggae music and enjoys cookery at school when ingredients are provided for her. Charlotte has many friends however assumes people like her because her brothers sell drugs.
Wider Family	Charlotte is the only female child of Julie Maxwell. She has three elder brothers, Toby, 24 currently serving a prison sentence following a grievous bodily harm conviction, 17-year-old Phillip who is attending college on a vocational plumbing course, but is known to police on suspicion of possession, Ken

is 16 and has two months left at a youth offender institute for cannabis cultivation offences. Charlotte has a two-year-old brother Freddie, to whom Charlotte is very attached. Charlie also has a grandmother (maternal) whom she is emotionally close to, however lives several bus rides away and does not see her much.

Charlotte has no contact with her father or her father's family and has no idea of his whereabouts.

Service Involvement

Wider family known to social services. Police have returned Charlotte to her home on multiple occasions after being found asleep in the park. Mother is known to police and domestic abuse services as a victim of abuse. Three older brothers are known to police for assault and drug-related charges.

Personal Situation

Chaotic household. Pro criminal behaviour. Known drug-related behaviour. The current partner of mum is unemployed. Mum drinks heavily, is diagnosed with depression, anxiety, and PTSD. Charlotte reports liking school; however, poor attendance is due to being regularly relied upon to babysit her younger brother and grades have decreased significantly since Freddie was born. Family members do not regularly attend parent's evenings or engage with the school; however, mum has attended all meetings relating to Charlotte's offence. There is nothing to indicate poverty or income deficit in the home despite the household being reliant on sickness and unemployment benefits. The children appear to be adequately clothed; Charlotte does not appear undernourished or unkempt and is reported to consistently have the latest mobile phone, gaming equipment and trainers.

Youth Account

Charlotte's account of the day states that Mr Jones was questioning her attitude in class, asking her if she was drunk and enquiring if she had alcohol in her bag.

According to Charlotte, Mr Jones had no right to try to confiscate her bag and she grabbed a chair with which to separate herself from him. In response to him approaching her, she hit him with the chair. Charlotte states Mr Jones did not back away and therefore she hit him a second time with the chair.

Charlotte was removed from the room by a senior member of staff, police were called, and Mr Jones left to seek medical attention. It is known by the school that Charlotte has a dislike for many of the male staff and was observed by others in the class as hostile towards men.

Charlotte admits to drinking vodka on the day but refuses to disclose where it came from. Charlotte says she drinks to 'feel numb'.

This was a first-time offence with no evidence of premeditation or planning. Charlotte was under the influence of alcohol, that she had brought into school. Charlotte is remorseful about Mr Jones injuries but becomes agitated and aggressive when questioned about the obtaining and drinking of alcohol.

There are no concerns regarding learning difficulties or communication needs.

Info Sources

Above information has been collated from Cherry Tree School, police, family, court hearing, witness statements, peer groups, social services. Mr Jones. Interviews with Charlotte.

Key Actions

To facilitate rehabilitation, reduce risk to herself or others and decrease the chances and opportunities to re-offend, Charlotte

has received a six-month referral order and a referral contract. It is believed that in order to maintain Charlotte's well-being, she may benefit from interventions and support services such as:

Advocacy services in line with the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014.

Support and education concerning her misuse of alcohol.

Anger management and control support.

Violence management strategies.

Youth activities such as joining a choir and opportunities to engage in age-appropriate leisure time.

Careers service advice to improve aspirations.

Restorative Justice approaches.

Part 2

Personal, Family and Social Factors

It is necessary to consider how Charlotte's behaviour is influenced by the environmental circumstances around her. Charlotte lives at home with her mum, mum's boyfriend and four brothers aged 24, 17, 16 and nearly 2. The three-bedroom house is overcrowded and damp. Charlotte shares her room with her youngest brother. This situation is problematic as research suggests that a lack of physical space restricts a child's success at school, a lack of personal space inhibits quiet time required for personal development and living in close proximity with others accelerates the transmission of infection and weakens immune systems, (Goux and Maurin, 2005). Charlotte's relationship with her mum has broken down since the arrival of a new boyfriend. Charlotte does not like mum's boyfriend and the negative influence he has had on her elder brothers. Charlotte feels that the boyfriend is encouraging her brothers to deal in drugs. Julie has post-partum depression and is drinking heavily. Charlotte is very fond of her youngest brother and is relied upon regularly to provide care for him. Charlotte would like to spend more time with her maternal grandmother in a town fifteen miles away. Given that Charlotte has potentially been coerced into taking drugs to school there is a concern that Charlotte may be led into the supply of drugs and exploited by her brothers and her mum's

boyfriend. Local safeguarding services, for example, the *Mid and West Wales Safeguarding Board*, should be contacted and made aware.

Offending and anti-social behaviour.

Charlotte has pleaded guilty to the offence of Actual Bodily Harm (ABH) and has been sentenced to a six-month referral order. Alongside the offence of ABH, other behaviours of concern are the outbursts of anger which are exasperated by alcohol and sleeping rough in the park to avoid going home. When Charlotte is not under the influence of alcohol, she is embarrassed and remorseful of the angry and aggressive behaviour she exhibits. Conditions of Charlotte's referral order contract are to cease sleeping rough, cease drinking alcohol in public places and cease concealing alcohol in her school bag. The Ministry of Justice (2013), agree that alcohol consumption, particularly binge drinking, alongside contributory factors such as negative childhood experiences and pressurising socio-cultural norms are common characteristics in violent crime and therefore stopping the alcohol consumption will go some way towards Charlotte managing her anger and aggression. Furthermore, it is hoped therefore that sleeping in the park and putting her safety at risk will cease. Given that Charlotte's substance misuse is harmful, an advocate will work together with Charlotte to seek appropriate support services. These will give Charlotte opportunities to engage with hobbies such as music or cookery and provide age-appropriate activities, filling her time with purpose and distracting her from negative self-stigmatising thoughts resulting in the need to numb the feelings with alcohol. One such service is *Barod Cymru*, a specialist substance misuse service for young people is available. The service offers one to one support including assessment, interventions and care plans for young people who use Substances. Support for families and 'concerned others' to understand, respond and cope with child substance misuse. School and community workshops and sessions to raise awareness with peer education groups are also available.

In terms of youth activities appropriate, combined with support and empowerment, *DrMz* is a safe stimulating space in which the best interests of 8–25-year-olds is promoted, where the Carmarthenshire Family Support Strategy 2018-2024 (2018), states resilience is built and skills are developed to live, learn and achieve. The report suggests that Charlotte's anger and aggressive outbursts be investigated. Counselling can be provided by *Area 43* in response to the numbness which Charlotte admits to needing and virtual resources such as *Young Minds* could aid anonymous support. Finally, some careers intervention from *Careers Wales* to

encourage Charlotte with aspirations and goals within the education system would enable Charlotte to look to her future.

Foundations for Change

Charlotte has signed a contract as part of her referral order and confirmed a commitment to adhere to the terms, which are to engage in services designed to support her and attend a meeting with her teacher Mr Jones to participate in restorative justice practices. With the agreement of Charlotte and Mr Jones, restorative justice will be the key to Charlotte recognising the consequences of her actions and how her behaviour has impacted him and those around him. Crawford and Newburn (2013), acknowledge restorative justice as an ideology that is advocated for as not only a part of the sanctioning process but is as important if not more so, in deterring reoffending. This is based on the offender gaining first-hand knowledge of the circumstances their crime has led to from the victim, and for both parties to gain control of their reactions and attitudes concerning the offence, (Crawford and Newburn, 2013). Morris (2002) specifies that intervention and communication between victims and offenders is a strong and motivational way for both parties to realise the consequences of the crime on the victim and affording a clearer picture of what led to the offence for the injured party.

Self-Assessment

In order to ensure that Charlotte feels involved and committed to planning and maintaining positive outcomes, a self-assessment questionnaire can be an effective tool in assisting children and young people to reflect on past, present and future behaviours, the consequences of such and effective strategies to improve outcomes. Using the AssetPlus Model (2014), self-assessment process or similar will support Charlotte to 'reflect on her offence', take ownership of her situation and encourage her to realise her feelings and emotions on a broad range of factors, such as friends, school, home life, relationships, health needs and aspirations. This will foster feelings of empowerment and inclusion in her own circumstances. Also allowing for ownership of circumstances and as part of her referral order, Charlotte will participate in a restorative justice (RJ) conference with Mr Jones. Structured as an approach embedded in empowerment and respect, Zehr (2015), RJ is defined by those who study criminology as one of the most meaningful advances in reparation

practice to have developed over recent decades, Crawford and Newburn (2003), and is according to the Ministry of Justice (2014),

“The process that brings those harmed by crime, and those responsible for the harm, into communication, enabling everyone affected by a particular incident to play a part in repairing the harm and finding a positive way forward”.

Critical scrutiny for restorative justice comes from multiple viewpoints. Richards (2012), argues that such meetings between offenders and victims can recreate the trauma previously suffered. Similarly, Bruce and Bolitho (2019), offer that the emotional impact of restorative justice practice is unpredictable and undetermined. Furthermore, Gang *et al.* (2021), argue that without the implementation of robust monitoring there is a lack of evidence to justify funding the approach. When utilised in the youth justice landscape it is the encouragement of reintegrative shaming theory, Braithwaite (1989), which plays the greatest role. According to the hypothesis, within restorative practice, accepting and acknowledging the feelings of shame by the youth will separate the offender from the offence. This approach will lead Charlotte to consider her feelings about the event, take responsibility for her offending behaviour and motivate her to refrain from recidivism, (Braithwaite 1989).

Part 3

Role of an Advocate.

Two areas of focus are highlighted regarding the role of an advocate employed to support Charlotte in her involvement with youth justice. Firstly, central to the contemporary youth justice process is the AssetPlus model which has been designed to deliver a nationally consistent intervention framework throughout England and Wales, ensuring all stakeholders hold a ‘high-level overview’ of young people within the youth justice system, (Youth Justice Board, 2014). In contrast to this, Picken *et al* (2019) find that this structure does not allow for a child-centred approach due to it being ridged and time-consuming. Providing further evidence, they state that of youth offending teams interviewed in their AssetPlus process evaluation, many practitioners state a need to design their own child-friendly approaches. This will need to be addressed in order for an independent professional advocate (IPA) to remain independent of the youth justice board. The criticisms for AssetPlus reinforce this lens, with Hampson (2017), questioning its efficacy. They claim that despite the reduction of children within the youth justice system, the incidences of youth crime continue to rise. This,

Hampson (2017), explain, is caused by the desistance led model neglecting to recognise and develop protective factors, attending only to the cessation of crime. Responding to this is Evans *et al* (2020), who stipulate the necessity of an approach that links the theories and research on desistance, together with child development beliefs and adverse childhood circumstances to form a practice on which rehabilitation can be underpinned. Secondly, Barnert, Perry and Azzi (2015), warn of a lack of juvenile voice in justice academia and policy. They urge practitioners to remember that youth are the experts of their own experience, acknowledging the opportunity for justice-involved youth to be best placed to define the strengths and weaknesses of the system. In reference to this, Brent (2013), states that it is essential to remember that if young people do not recognise their ability to make meaningful decisions, they will abandon all hope of achieving a future they have control of and that advocates, independent of all but their client, are ‘uniquely positioned’ to actively respond to the individual needs of justice-involved youth, (Mikah and Wallace, 2020). Therefore, through an advocacy lens, an (IPA) will firstly focus their attention on Charlotte and her needs, recognising the hardship already suffered, alongside how she may be feeling in relevance to the offence in order to hear her voice and empower her, (Boylan and Dalrymple, 2009). Secondly, realise that only through the direct participation of a child is positive change within children’s service’s to be obtained, (Frankel, 2018). Finally, an acknowledgement that a one size fits all approach such as the AssetPlus Model is not best suited to all children, and that local authorities should be afforded the control of their own information gathering, Taylor (2016).

The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 refers to advocacy as having two specific duties, ‘*speaking up for and with individuals who are not being heard*’ and ‘*safeguarding those who are at risk*’. Advocacy is further acknowledged in the Act, by stating that it is for an advocate to address what ‘*advice and help*’ can be expected within the criminal justice system. Therefore, alongside the evidence in the report above and the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014, it is clear that Charlotte should be offered an advocate who will assist with the defining, planning and implementation of support and services to reduce the potential for Charlotte to re-offend and to reduce risks to herself and to others that are associated with her behaviour. Furthermore, before meeting an offender in contact with the youth justice system, an advocate will have in their possession as much information about the young person as possible and be fully familiar with the individuality of

the child and the uniqueness of the offence, (Thompson, 2000). In the case study, Charlotte is adhering to the specifications of her contract and the advocate alongside the multiple agencies involved will work cohesively to design and deliver support tailored to her needs.

There are two types of risk attributed to 'children who offend', these being a risk to self or others and the risk of reoffending (Case, 2021). It can be seen that Charlotte is living in a home amongst increasing criminal activity which requires challenging in order to allow her to find new norms and behaviours, (Parliament. House of Commons, 2011). In terms of resilience and protective factors, it is apparent that Charlotte is remorseful. It is also evidenced in the report that mum is attending meetings with Charlotte in relation to the offence. This suggests that mum is taking active steps to support Charlotte. The report states that Charlotte misses her grandmother, and strong, supportive family connections are essential in the promotion of non-offending behaviour (Farmer, 2017). This indicates that despite the complex picture within the context of siblings and their inter-connected relationships with parents and the developmental outcomes that are determined by parenting skills, Stormshak *et al* (2009), encouraging Charlotte to recognise the importance of retaining the bonds between herself, mum, Freddie and her grandma and opportunities to enhance these. *Carmarthenshire Family Information Service* provides information for families, carers and professionals, offering guidance and advice on child and family issues and supportive solutions such as *The Families First Early Intervention Programme*. This local authority managed project provides engagement officers to support with regular school attendance, and family support workers offering intensive support to vulnerable families with complex relationships. This service will contribute to travel costs or provide transport for Charlotte to visit her grandmother thus encouraging a sense of belonging and purpose alongside a source of comfort and security (Angel, 2014). This will result in Charlotte being distracted away from offending and the criminal behaviour exhibited by her brothers. Strong and supportive family connections are essential in the reduction of offending and offer added emotional support while reinforcing a sense of belonging and reasons to remain positive, (Walker *et al*, 2015).

To support desistance, Maruna *et al* (2015), describe two influencing theoretical components. These are social characteristics and internal factors. In agreement, Deering and Evans (2018), explain three key themes in terms of internal factors to be maturity, identity and adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). They explain that adolescent development is

exceptionally individual and despite children and young people being able to make moral judgements, they are unable to grasp the wider implications of their behaviour due to immature social, emotional, and moral skills which are in turn characterised by personal experiences and socio-cultural environments (Deering and Evans 2018). According to the Youth Justice Institute (2021), trauma and ACEs are not uncommon amongst children in the justice system and add that the majority of those supervised by the youth justice system tend to come from disadvantaged backgrounds and suffer the range of associated problems relevant to poverty. In a similar context, Wall, Higgins and Hunter (2016) express concern that there are many barriers yet to be broken in order to practice a trauma-focused approach within youth Justice. Responding to this, Deering, and Evans (2018) suggest a co-produced approach to desistance by way of moving away from identifying risks that are defined by structural models of support and replacing them with the 'co-identification' of strengths. This implies that professionals should practice in an empathic, motivational, and non-judgemental manner, advocating to Charlotte, a joint contribution to human and social capital. Dalrymple (2005) further encourages this argument and states that the construction of advocacy in terms of friendship and developing a sense of loyalty with a young person indicates a more balanced child-adult relationship facilitating the sharing of knowledge rather than imposing expertise.

It can be seen that an independent professional advocate has the potential to change the path of a young offender exponentially and that the neutrality and flexibility with which an IPA can practice, is vital to the outcomes for young people, (Fox, 2018). Fostering and collaborating an environment of positive change, recognising and responding to both previous and current adversities alongside supporting children and young people to voice feelings, needs and opinions in order to shape their own circumstances and future, underpin the role of an advocate in youth justice services, (Percy-Smith and Thomas, 2009). These strategies also serve to enable diversionary mechanisms, an approach currently the subject of a parliamentary inquiry, Justice Committee (2021), and similar to the *Swansea Bureau Model*, Haines *et al* (2013) in which youth crime is tackled by multi-agency interventions to combine the underlying causes of youth crime with children's rights and child participation in order to reduce reoffending attitudes. Following the non-discriminatory principles provided in the Advocacy Charter (2018), an advocate will enhance participation in decisions made, ensure a commitment to rights and entitlements being presented and upheld and improve the

social outcomes for young people who are in touch with the youth justice system (Youth Justice Blueprint 2019) This is supported by Public Health England (2019), who confirms that the collaborative approach by practitioners of 'recovery, resilience and well-being' promotion, underpin approaches to the prevention of offending and re-offending.

To conclude, this assignment commences with a comprehensive account of an adolescent female in contact with youth justice services and introduces Charlotte, her family and their circumstances in an effort to familiarise practitioners working with this youth. It then considers the types of support and rehabilitation appropriate to a young person and what is required of an advocate to effectively practice with a youth in contact with youth justice services. It can be seen that aspects of the AssetPlus model such as the self-assessment framework, are valuable tools, however, it is also observed that the approach does not respond to individual needs and the identification of why criminal behaviour occurs. It can be seen that using the framework allows for all key information about an individual in the youth justice system to be stored in one place making the transition between agencies and services straightforward. The completion of a report such as this enhances the performance of all identified professionals in the best interests of both the youth justice teams and the youths themselves. The final section allows for the clarification of an advocate's role and offers clear evidence that an independent professional advocate, in accordance with policy, has the potential to reinforce the youth justice boards endeavours with suitable services and more personally tailored support, diverting a young person from a life of crime and reducing the chances of social exclusion.

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