EVALUATION PROTOCOL - ADDENDUM

Using a creative writing programme (New Chapters) to improve behavioural difficulties for young people in prison: A randomised controlled trial.

University of Manchester

Principal investigator: Charlotte Lennox



Addendum: Wellbeing Top Up

Trial Name	Using a creative writing programme (New Chapters) to improve behavioural difficulties for young people in prison: A randomised controlled trial.
Delivery Partner	National Literacy Trust
Evaluation PI	Dr Charlotte Lennox – University of Manchester
Funding Organisation	Youth Endowment Fund
Link to Original Trial Protocol	https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/wp- content/uploads/2024/08/New-Chapters- Evaluation-Protocol-October-2024-1.pdf
Wellbeing measures used	Short Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (SWEMWBS)

About the What Works Centre for Wellbeing

The UK government has a long-lasting interest in the wellbeing of citizens, with the UK being one of the first countries to systematically measure subjective wellbeing at the population level, and to commit to using it, alongside economic data, in shaping policy decisions. The What Works Centre for Wellbeing (WWCW) was established in 2014 to help government understand how to best improve people's lives by ensuring that our policies and practices positively contribute to people's wellbeing.

The WWCW closed on 30th April 2024, following the end of multi-year grants from The National Lottery Community Fund. Between 2014 and 2024 the WWCW made a significant contribution to government, including work on methods, and specifically the Green Book guidance on wellbeing.

About the Youth Endowment Fund

The Youth Endowment Fund (YEF) is a charity with a mission that matters. We exist to prevent children and young people becoming involved in violence. We do this by finding out what works and building a movement to put this knowledge into practice.

Children and young people at risk of becoming involved in violence deserve services that give them the best chance of a positive future. To make sure that happens, we'll fund promising projects and then use the very best evaluation to find out what works. Just as we benefit from robust trials in medicine, young people deserve support grounded in the evidence. We'll build that knowledge through our various grant rounds and funding activity.

And just as important is understanding children and young people's lives. Through our Youth Advisory Board and national network of peer researchers, we'll ensure they influence our work and we understand and are addressing their needs. But none of this will make a difference if all we do is produce reports that stay on a shelf.

Together we need to look at the evidence and agree what works, then build a movement to make sure that young people get the very best support possible. Our strategy sets out how we'll do it. At its heart it says that we will fund good work, find what works and work for change. You can read it <u>here</u>.

About the Wellbeing Top-Up Fund

The WWCW Wellbeing Top Up Fund will explore the impact that policy interventions can have on people's wellbeing across a range of policy areas by funding additional wellbeing data collection on 10 existing studies. This approach will begin to develop a step change in our understanding of the wellbeing impacts of various policy interventions through a low-cost programme that can 'piggyback' on trials that are already in the field.

Background

The Children and Young People's Secure Estate (CYPSE) consists of three accommodation types, Young Offender Institutions (YOI), Secure Training Centres (STC) and Secure Children's Homes (SCH). A new type of accommodation is being introduced and will open in 2024 called a Secure School and this will be categorised as a SCH. All types of secure accommodation can accommodate those young people who are serving custodial sentences. Those aged 15 to 18 tend to be accommodated in YOIs, which are the largest setting type.

As of January 2024, there were about 520 young people aged 15–18-year-olds currently in custody in England and Wales (HM Prison and Probation Service [HMPPS] & Youth Custody Service [YCS], 2024). There is a disproportionate number of young people from racially

marginalised backgrounds within the CYPSE with 55% of those surveyed identifying as such (HM Inspectorate of Prisons [HMIP], 2023). The population of young people in YOIs and STCs has been declining (HMIP, 2023), but despite this decline, the proportion of those from racially marginalised backgrounds and those with multiple and complex needs is increasing (Case & Browning, 2021). The proportion of young people with needs and vulnerabilities within the CYPSE is also overrepresented when compared to the general population, e.g., 80% of young people within the youth justice system have a Special Educational Needs & Disability (SEND) (Department for Education [DfE] & Ministry of Justice [MoJ], 2022); 37-50% of young people in custody have been in contact with social care services at some point in their lives (Day, 2021); and 66%-90% of young people have below average language skills and 46-67% falling into the poor and very poor group (Bryan et al., 2010). Young people from racially marginalised backgrounds in the community also experience higher rates of school exclusion (Timpson, 2019) and are more likely to have moderate learning difficulties (Strand & Lindorff, 2018).

Within the CYPSEs, there have been rising levels of violence and behavioural difficulties. From 2021 to 2022, the rate of incidents for assault in custody per 100 children has increased by 25%, with the rate of Restrictive Physical Interventions growing by 17% (YJB, 2023). Alongside the prevalence of violent incidents inside custody, the rate of young people in custody due to committing a violent offence has almost doubled in recent years from 33% in 2015-16 to 65% in 2022-2023 (Youth Custody Report, 2023). These statistics reflect a trend of increasing violence and complexity in young people, highlighting an urgent need for effective interventions to target these issues, especially considering the overrepresentation of behavioural disorders for children in custody (Teplin et al., 2023). While externalising behaviour is also important. These behaviours can cause harm, often co-exist with externalising behaviours and are linked to educational performance (Liu et al., 2011). In addition, there is evidence that the detection of internalising behaviour difficulties is under detected within the CYPSE (Mitchell & Shaw, 2011).

When young people enter custody, they often have had a disrupted educational background. Around 13% will have received a permanent school exclusion and almost three-quarters (72.2%) having at least one fixed exclusion (MoJ & DfE, 2016). Whilst in custody, young people are entitled to receive education. Currently, the CYPSE aims to provide 30 hours of education a week (YJB, 2016), however lower levels of educational attainment have been found in those who have received a custodial sentence (MoJ & DfE, 2016). Only 1% of young people sentenced to less than 12 months in custody achieved 5 or more GCSEs (or equivalents) graded A* to C (MoJ & DfE, 2016). Literacy levels of those sentenced were particularly low with 56% of young people achieving the expected level in reading and only 28% in writing at Key Stage 2, compared with 87% and 68% of total pupils in the cohort respectively (MoJ & DfE, 2016). Additionally, education quality is poor and reported to be declining. Inspections of prisons judged that only 27% had educational programmes that were "good" or "outstanding" (Ofsted, 2023b). Specifically, Ofsted and HMIP (2022) deemed reading in prisons to be extremely poor, stating that reading ability was improving too slowly and interventions were needed to improve reading ability (Ofsted, 2023a).

Creativity has been associated with numerous positive outcomes. A meta-analysis of creativity and well-being analysed 26 quantitative studies, finding evidence of a significantly positive, modest relationship between creativity and well-being (Acar et al., 2020). Involving concrete steps towards goals and having an audience witness the outcome of the creative activity strengthened creativity's effect on well-being. Creativity has also been associated with positive outcomes in an adult prison setting. A qualitative study into artist-led prion interventions found that participating in a creativity-based intervention led to feelings of increased self-confidence, increased trust in the outside world and decreased aversion to vulnerability (Diamond & Lanskey, 2023). Studies have also found evidence that creativity promotes positive change in prisoners and serves as a stepping stone towards further education for adult prisoners by breaking the mould of traditional education (Anderson et al., 2011; Caulfield et al., 2016; Halperin et al., 2012).

There is currently limited evidence for the use of art-based interventions with young people at risk of, or already involved in, violence and/or crime. Studies reviewed from a recent mixed methods systematic review suggested that art-based interventions may lead to positive emotions, development of the sense of self, successful engagement in creative processes and practices, and the development of positive personal relationships (Mansfield et al., 2024). However, the review found insufficient evidence from quantitative studies to support the effectiveness of art-based interventions on behavioural, psychosocial, cognitive, and offending outcomes. There is a clear need to develop the evidence base with a dearth of robust evaluations examining the ability of arts-based interventions to impact on violence-related child outcomes. Additionally, there is sparse evidence from robust impact evaluations of creative writing programmes, with none to date focusing on young people in custody.

New Chapters is a creative writing programme delivered to people in both YOIs and adult prisons. The programme began in 2018 and as of 2022 was delivering sessions in nine YOIs/prisons across England. The programme aims to enable individuals to express themselves through their own forms of creative writing; building self-esteem and supporting them to build a more positive, prosocial identity. Preliminary evidence presented in the 2022 New Chapters impact report suggests the intervention has a positive effect. The report found that 85% of the sample of 178 young people engaging with the project reported that the sessions made them 'feel better in general'. Also, 82% said that the sessions 'inspired them to think about their futures more'. In terms of literacy outcomes, 80% of the sample said the sessions encouraged them to write more, followed by 71% who felt more encouraged to read. Additionally, almost three-quarters (73%) of the sample felt the sessions made them enjoy

writing more and 82% felt more confident expressing themselves in writing. The quality of the intervention was also rated highly, with 93% rating the sessions as 'excellent' or 'good'. Furthermore, the report highlighted qualitative support for the positive impact of New Chapters, identifying three key impacts of the intervention: improving confidence with, and enjoyment of, writing; improving well-being and raising aspirations; and encouraging participants to tell their stories and feel their voice is being heard (National Literacy Trust, 2022).

However, there is a lack of robust experimental evidence for arts-based interventions for young people in contact with the criminal justice system. As highlighted above, a review of arts interventions found that there was not enough quantitative data to make any conclusions and for the qualitative data, there were found to be many methodological flaws, with much focusing on the experiences of the young people, but lacking focus on intervention design/implementation and limited analysis of demographics. This also sits within the context of few robust experimental studies of any type of intervention within the CYPSE (Chitsabesan et al., 2022; Lennox et al., 2020; Mitchell et al., 2011).

In the proposed research, we will conduct a randomised controlled trial (RCT) with process evaluation and internal pilot (to assess trial feasibility) where young people in prison will be randomly allocated to receive New Chapters plus Business as Usual (BAU) or BAU alone to evaluate reduction in behavioural difficulties.

About the Intervention

New Chapters is a 12-session manualised creative writing intervention, delivered face-to-face, once a week, in a group of no more than six. Each session will last for up to 90 minutes. It aims to enable individuals to express themselves through their own forms of creative writing; building self-esteem and supporting them to build a more positive, prosocial identity, which in turn will reduce behavioural difficulties. Each session is delivered by a National Literacy Trust (NLT) Project Manager (PM) who will develop a series of sessions that are structured, yet innovative, flexible, and creative. Each young person has a clear, tailored goal to work towards and they have a clear purpose for writing. Professional authors will deliver two sessions. The authors have the status as "professional authors" and have inspiring stories of overcoming adversity, one of the sessions will also include an author with lived expereience of the criminal justice system. At the end of each 12 sessions it will culminate in a celebration event, with an audience, via The National Prison Radio.

Trial Design

Project title	Using a creative writing programme (New Chapters) to improve behavioural difficulties for young people in prison: A randomised controlled trial.
Developer (Institution)	National Literacy Trust (NLT)
Evaluator (Institution)	The University of Manchester (UoM)
Principal Investigator(s)	Dr Charlotte Lennox
Protocol author(s)	Dr Lesley-Anne Carter; Dr Jo Deakin; Dr Claire Fox; Dr Kim Turner; Professor Prathiba Chitsabesan
Trial design	Two arm, individually randomised (1:1), superiority randomised controlled trial (RCT) of New Chapters, in addition to Business as Usual (BAU)
Trial type	Efficacy with internal pilot.
Evaluation settings	Prison (3 x Young Offender Institutions & 1 x Secure School)
Target group	Boys aged 15-18 serving a custodial sentence
Number of participants	375
Primary outcome and data source	Self-reported behaviour difficulties via Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ)
Secondary outcome and data source	 Self-reported empathy via Basic Empathy Scale (BES) Self-reported pro-social identity via Pro-Social IDentity Scale (PIDS) Self-reported self-esteem via Self-Esteem Measure for Prisoners (SEM-P) Self-reported mental wellbeing via Short Warwick- Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (SWEMWBS)

Inclusion Criteria Exclusion Criteria	 Self-reported creativity via Creative Self-Efficacy Scale for Children and Adolescents (CASES) Behaviour incidents via prison records. Boys aged 15-18 years old Serving a custodial sentence Having at least 3 months remaining on sentence On remand Having less than 3 months left on sentence Not able to provide informed consent Parental consent not provided for those under 16 Requires an interpreter Those presenting a risk to the research or intervention team and/or where they are unable to mix with others in a group setting
Intervention Duration	12 weeks
Follow-up Duration	Between 91 and 152 days post randomisation
Planned Trial Period	30 months

Wellbeing Measurement

Short Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale [SWEMWBS]; Vaingankar et al., 2017).

SWEMWBS is a seven-item scale about thoughts and feelings, which relate more to functioning than feelings and so offer a slightly different perspective on mental wellbeing. The seven statements are positively worded with five response categories from 'none of the time' to 'all of the time'. The statements are: I've been feeling optimistic about the future; I've been feeling relaxed; I've been dealing with problems well; I've been thinking clearly; I've been feeling close to other people; and I've been able to make up my own mind about things. This has been validated in clinical samples and with young people (Vaingankar, et al., 2017; Hauch et al., 2023)

Analytical Approach

Analysis of primary and secondary outcomes will follow intention-to-treat principals – participants will be analysed in the groups to which they were randomised. We will follow the

CONSORT extension for nonpharmacological interventions. Estimates of intervention effects will be presented alongside 95% confidence intervals. Statistical significance will be set at 5%.

The primary analysis of the SDQ will use a linear mixed model, given the partially nested structure of the data where there is clustering in the intervention arm only. This will model the clustering in the intervention arm and treat individuals as cluster size 1 in the BAU arm. The random effects specification will explicitly model the between-treatment heteroskedasticity, as advised by Roberts and Roberts, 2005.

Secondary outcomes will be analysed similarly. All inferential analyses will adjust for stratification factors used in randomisation. Additionally, baseline outcome and prognostic variables will be adjusted for to improve power. Where outcome variables are skewed, bootstrapped confidence intervals will be presented.

There are no interim analyses planned.

A statistical analysis plan will be developed detailing all analyses planned which will be reviewed by the TSC before final approval from the funder prior to the database lock and release of allocation codes.

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