

# **Analysis of support for young people with special educational needs (SEN) in the youth justice sector in Wales**

## ***Producing a Young People Friendly Summary***

**Arad Consulting**



***and***

**ProMo**



Submitted: 2 September 2009

Arad Consulting  
Enterprise House  
126/127 Bute Street  
Cardiff Bay  
CF10 5LE  
029 2044 0552  
[post@aradconsulting.com](mailto:post@aradconsulting.com)  
[www.aradconsulting.com](http://www.aradconsulting.com)

## **Background**

The Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (DCELLS) of the Welsh Assembly Government commissioned Arad Consulting, in association with Dr Jonathan Evans of the University of Glamorgan, to undertake an *Analysis of support for young people with Special Educational Needs (SEN) in the youth justice sector in Wales*.

The team reported its findings in July 2009. This report outlines the process of producing a young people-friendly summary of the report, along with the actual summary produced.

## **Method**

A small discussion group was convened. The group was made up of Dan, Yasmin and Portia, three young people aged 15 – 23 (with whom ProMo have worked in the past, most notably in editing the sprout information website for young people in Cardiff).

Before the group session the main report was summarised into a four page executive summary and this then was used as the basis of discussion. The group discussion was led by Kath Allen (an experienced facilitator of young people's groups) and by Sioned Lewis (research team member who was able to answer question on the wider research project).

The session was held on 20<sup>th</sup> August 2009 and lasted two and a half hours; slightly longer than planned due to the enthusiasm of the participants. The session began with an overview of the research paper and its key messages, followed by group reading and discussion of sections. Working as one group changes and additions were made to the document on a laptop, with the results projected on a screen so that everyone could follow the changes as they were being made.

It was suggested that a question and answer format would help break up the text into smaller and easier-to-understand sections, and after listing possible questions and drawing out some answers from the text it was decided that this format worked well. Six questions were posed and answered.

Some of the points raised by the group during the process of summarising the report include:

### **General points**

"You've got to start with explaining the youth justice system"

"Easier to get it in a frequently asked questions, as long as they read the answer"

"You forget that people like me have a short attention span, or at least that's what they say"

### **Definitions and terms**

Defining special educational need took time. There was a consensus in the group that the term Special Educational Needs needed explaining further, and they wanted to avoid the use of the word 'special' in the answers. After considering the description 'someone who has problems with their school work' the group settled on 'someone who has difficulty learning'. In several of the answers the three young people gave thoughtful consideration to "sounding neutral".

**Fig 1: The summary as drafted on 20<sup>th</sup> August 2009.**

Analysis of support for young people with special educational needs (SEN) in the youth justice sector in Wales: Summary

This report is about young people with Special Educational Needs who are in the Youth Justice System.

**When is a young person involved with the Youth Justice System?**

*Signed to find description, possible from YJB website. Include something about youth offending team*

**What is meant by Special Educational Needs?**

This refers to someone who has difficulty learning and may need extra help and support.

**Why was this research carried out?**

The youth offending teams thought that many of the young people they work with had Special Educational Needs that were not previously identified.

**How many young people does this affect?**

There are far more young people who have difficulties with learning in the Youth Justice System than in schools. The research has shown that 25% of young people involved with the Youth Justice System have difficulties with learning, compared to just over 3% of young people in schools.

**Are the Special Educational Needs of young people identified?**

Not all young people have their difficulties with learning identified in school, sometimes it is hard for teachers to see that they need extra help. Some reasons for this might be:

- Young people move from school to school so they aren't as well known to teachers
- Teachers might not be trained to identify Special Educational Needs
- Special Educational Needs can be mistaken for other problems such as disruptive behaviour

Youth offending teams carry out assessments of the young people that they come into contact with, this helps identify the extra help that they need. Sometimes the assessment is not carried out fully and the young persons' difficulties with learning remain unidentified.

Some young people that go into a youth offending institution still do not have their learning difficulties recognised. It is hard for young offenders to get a place in school, college, training or employment and this is even harder for young people with learning difficulties.

**What is being done to help them and what more can be done?**

Teachers, youth offending team workers and other professionals who work with young people should have more training to spot learning difficulties. Young people could also have assessments carried out earlier in life to identify the support they need.

Experts in identifying Special Educational Needs should be shared between youth offending teams across Wales. Information about young peoples difficulties with learning should also be shared.

We need to start talking more about Special Educational Needs

Everything should be done to make sure that young people go into education, training or employment as soon as possible after leaving the care of the youth offending team.

The session was drawn to a close after two and a half hours. It was agreed that Sioned Lewis, as the facilitator, would check that the summary accurately reflected the content of the main report and would proof-read the text. Figure 2 is the revised summary.

**Fig 2: Revised final summary**

**Analysis of support for young people with special educational needs (SEN) in the youth justice sector in Wales: Summary**

This report is about young people with Special Educational Needs who are in the Youth Justice System.

**When is a young person involved with the Youth Justice System?**

When a young person gets into trouble and breaks the law they are dealt with by the youth justice system. The system has different stages. At first the young person may get a warning but for a more serious offence they will appear before a youth court. If the court finds them guilty it will decide on a sentence. At every stage in the system the local youth offending team will work with the young person to prevent them breaking the law again.

**What is meant by Special Educational Needs?**

This refers to someone who has difficulty learning and may need extra help and support.

**Why was this research carried out?**

The youth offending teams thought that many of the young people that they work with had Special Educational Needs but that these needs were not previously identified.

### **How many young people does this affect?**

There are far more young people who have difficulties with learning in the Youth Justice System than in schools. The research has shown that 25% of young people involved with the Youth Justice System have difficulties with learning, compared to just over 3% of young people in schools.

### **Are the Special Educational Needs of young people being identified?**

Not all young people have their difficulties with learning identified at school. Sometimes it is hard for teachers to see that they need extra help. Some reasons for this might be:

- Young people move from school to school so they aren't as well known to teachers
- Teachers might not be trained to identify Special Educational Needs
- Special Educational Needs can be mistaken for other problems such as disruptive behaviour.

Youth offending teams carry out assessments of the young people that they come into contact with, this helps identify the extra help that the young people need. Sometimes the assessment is not carried out fully and the young persons' difficulties with learning remain unidentified.

Some young people that go into a youth offending institution still do not have their learning difficulties recognised.

It is hard for young offenders to get a place in school, college, training or employment and this is even harder for those with learning difficulties.

### **What is being done to help them and what more can be done?**

Teachers, youth offending team workers and other professionals who work with young people should have more training to spot learning difficulties. Young people could also have assessments carried out earlier in life to identify the support they need.

Experts in identifying Special Educational Needs should be shared between youth offending teams across Wales. Information about young people's difficulties with learning should also be shared.

We need to start talking more about Special Educational Needs.

Everything should be done to make sure that young people go into education, training or employment as soon as possible after leaving the care of the youth offending team.