

TrACE CASE STUDY: Flintshire Youth Justice Service

Flintshire Youth Justice Service (YJS) is part of Flintshire County Council and works together with families and other agencies to make sure each young person gets access to the help they need. The primary role of the YJS is to prevent offending by children and young people. In addition to prevention, pre-court or court outcomes, children and young people also receive additional support and interventions linked to education, mental health support and the Youth Justice Centre.

Changes made in line with the TrACE Toolkit

Governance, leadership and organisation culture



Flintshire YJS have committed to becoming a trauma-informed service and have outlined a number of key organisational aims which are intended to impact the culture of the organisation:

- **Resilience & Strengths focused** to help staff develop the physical, mental, emotional and social strengths to support children and young people to adapt and grow ensuring they have a sense that they can achieve
- **Person Centred** such that staff listen and encourage / facilitate honest conversations responding to and delivery of co-produced plans with children, young people and families
- **Relationship Focused** by being kind, listening, being flexible, approachable, transparent and realistic with clear boundaries and support
- **Inclusivity** by ensuring that children and young people feel valued and supported to have equal access to services, support and opportunities, that they don't feel judged in accessing support and that their cultural and diversity needs are met
- **Universal Approach that does no harm** by utilising diversion and supporting access to universal services and avoiding and challenging the use of labels

In order to maintain momentum to becoming a trauma-informed service, a TrACE working group was established to support the service to progress actions against the self-assessment and implementation plan. The working group includes membership from:

- Wrexham University – Lecturer in Criminology & Trauma-informed Practice in Youth Justice
- ACE Hub Wales – Deputy Leader
- YJS Management Team
- YJS Practitioners (Trauma Champions)

ACE Hub Wales undertook a report on behalf of Flintshire Youth Justice Service (YJS) to baseline an understanding of trauma-informed practice to help the service to develop its staff and services for children. They identified that becoming a trauma-informed service is a long term strategy for Flintshire YJS.

Policies and procedures



Flintshire YJS have made a commitment to reviewing their policies and procedures to align with a trauma and ACE-informed approach. Their commitment was recognised during an inspection by HMIP (His Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation) in March 2024:

The YJS is developing trauma-informed practice through its partnership with Public Health Wales and by implementing the TrACE toolkit. It is also developing trauma-informed practice in its policies and procedures. This includes reviewing the use of language in reports (p.13).

Additionally Flintshire YJS continues to ensure that when policies and procedures are being reviewed, that trauma and ACEs are being considered and that engagement of young people, parents, and carers is undertaken and that sufficient time is provided in planning transitions.

During interviews with staff, it was noted that policies now have more flexibility to accommodate individual needs rather than rigid enforcement. Staff feel more confident in justifying decisions within a trauma-informed framework (e.g., not returning a child to court for non-compliance when there are underlying issues).

Workforce training and support



There have been a number of developments in this domain:

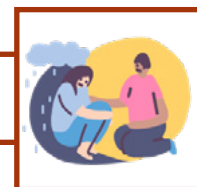
- YJS have introduced more reflective practice forums to help staff implement trauma-informed practice.
- Induction material has been updated and now references TrACE and Child First.
- A tailored youth justice training package has been developed with ACE Hub Wales and is being implemented.
- Additional training on vicarious trauma and trauma-informed language has been delivered through university partnerships.

Physical environment



Making changes to physical environments has been challenging, particularly because they are working within the wider criminal justice system (which is often not designed to meet the needs of CYP). However, meetings have taken place to discuss plans for creating child friendly spaces in some venues, highlighting that any spaces need to be mindful of TrACE principles. Discussions are also underway with His Majesty's Courts and Tribunal Service to explore opportunities to influence trauma-informed physical spaces in Court.

Service design and delivery



Flintshire YJS organised a team day in 2023 to start to look at service principles based on their statement of commitment. They developed a framework that allows practitioners more autonomy to focus on building trust and meeting children's needs rather than strictly following programme-based interventions. Staff now have the flexibility to form meaningful relationships with children, which was previously discouraged.

Monitoring and evaluation



Flintshire YJS have developed a number of approaches to monitor and evaluate their progress in implementing the TrACE Toolkit. The YJS Senior Manager undertakes annual staff assessments with the YJS team to assess their thoughts and feelings on the service and serves as a 'health check' on operational and strategic activities. This in turn informs the annual Youth Justice Plan.

Flintshire YJS has also attempted to increase feedback from children and young people. At the end of the child or young person's involvement with the service, they ask them to fill in a questionnaire commenting on their experience. So called 'soft outcomes' (relationships, accommodation, behaviour) before and at the end of interventions are also measured.

The Staff Stress Risk Assessment has been a recurring review conducted since 2018 by the YJS management team. The purpose of the assessment is to review the general welfare of the team and to provide an opportunity to discuss the wider operational and strategic elements in the service.

The organisation is still developing its approach to measuring trauma-informed impact. Existing tools (feedback forms, baseline staff assessments, training completion data) are being used to track progress. A key challenge is capturing long-term qualitative impacts that may not be immediately visible or quantifiable.

Evidence of Impact

External recognition

Following an inspection by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation in March 2024, inspectors commented on the approach to trauma-informed practice at Flintshire YJS:

The service is committed to becoming a trauma-informed service. In partnership with ACE Hub Wales (Public Health Wales) and Wrexham University, it has used the TrACE toolkit to develop an action plan and regularly monitors progress against this (p.11).

In November 2023 the Youth Justice Service Management Board commissioned a Peer Review from the Youth Justice Sector Improvement Partnership (YJSIP) to review the approaches to leadership and governance. Below are some of the comments linked to the TrACE work following their assessments:

“The PRT [Peer Review Team] found a consistent recognition and commitment to trauma-informed approaches. Partners commented on the YJS driving the agenda to embed trauma-informed language and practice, across the workforce and the partnership.”

“It was clear to the PRT that there was corporate ownership of ‘our’ children, regardless of the route by which children become known to services. There was clear evidence of a consistent awareness of trauma at all levels and a commitment to a trauma-informed workforce and practice.”

Staff perspectives

During the Ripple Effect Mapping (REM)¹ session with Flintshire YJS, it became clear how their use of the TrACE Toolkit had encouraged them to look outwards as well as inwards. They described working on a number of wider initiatives that are attempting to integrate trauma awareness into the systems that impact young people’s lives (including schools, police, magistrates, justice services etc). Much of this work is facilitated by close working relationships across sectors in North Wales.

While we did not have access to direct feedback from staff in Flintshire YJS, the service manager was able to provide a summary of their annual staff assessment review:


“Staff felt that they had a good degree of autonomy in the work that they do and that they have flexibility to deliver interventions in a manner in which they feel would be responsive to the child or young person. Staff feel that there is an increased understanding of working in a trauma-informed way but again raised that the ability to deliver such approaches is reliant on having enough resources and the team not being impacted by vacancies / long term absences” (Flintshire YJS Staff Assessment 2024)

Based on this assessment review, it was felt there had been a noticeable shift in how children are discussed, with a greater focus on understanding their broader experiences. This shift is now more evidence-based, giving staff greater confidence in articulating trauma-informed approaches. Staff are described as speaking with more confidence because they know that this forms part of a trauma-informed approach.

¹ This was a session facilitated by the evaluation team with staff members who had been involved in implementing the TrACE Toolkit. The purpose of the session was to understand if and how changes had led to impacts.

Feedback from young people

Feedback from CYP suggests they feel listened to, communication is good and there is an emphasis placed on developing good relationships. Self-reported feedback gathered from 88 CYP at the end of intervention, suggests positive gains have been made in most areas of their lives.



*"I think you've been brilliant.
You've listened to me and I don't
think anyone else does."*