Abstract
This study investigated the collaborative transition process for youth incarcerated for three or more months in New South Wales (‘NSW’) juvenile justice facilities. Qualitative methodology was employed to analyse interviews conducted with staff from both the education and juvenile justice systems in NSW to determine how the agencies involved with the transition planning for incarcerated youth collaborate. The study also aimed to determine the roles and understanding of staff in each sector with reference to the transition process. The results of the study were examined under the framework of Kohler’s Taxonomy for Transition Programming and revealed that although many best practices were occurring in the area, improvements to the coordination of interagency collaboration would improve the likelihood that incarcerated youth would successfully transition back into the community.

Keywords: incarcerated youth – transition to community – juvenile justice – transition planning – interagency collaboration – New South Wales

Introduction
Youth who are involved with the juvenile justice system often have complex needs, and typically experience dismal life outcomes in comparison with their mainstream peers (Halsey 2006). Globally, recidivism rates for this population are as high as 50 per cent or more in the United States (‘US’), United Kingdom and Australia (Kasinathan 2015; Ministry of Justice 2015; Snyder & Sickmund 2006). There is growing evidence that when transitions back to the
community are well planned, individualised and supported by the necessary services, the rate of recidivism decreases (Huang, Ryan & Herz 2012; Unruh & Griller Clark 2010). In order to achieve this, collaboration among all stakeholders is needed. When stakeholders collaborate, they form a system. Gonsoulin and Read (2011, p. 7) describe a collaborative system as ‘one made up of agencies committed to working together to foster better outcomes for youth and their families’.

Although transition planning and interagency collaboration during the transition process are especially crucial for this population, a lack of communication and collaboration between the relevant agencies has been identified as one of the main barriers to successful transitions (Chuang & Wells 2010; Gonsoulin & Read 2011). Baltodano, Mathur and Rutherford (2005) highlighted that this lack of collaboration and communication between the agencies involved contributes to adjudication and the increased likelihood of recidivism. The complex needs of this population, such as disability, poverty, health issues, and drug and alcohol misuse, often necessitate the involvement of numerous agencies and systems. These systems may include juvenile justice, mental health care, substance abuse treatment, education, housing, out-of-home care, and vocational/employment assistance (Brock, O’Cummings & Milligan 2008). Collaboration between these systems is imperative if the young person is to experience successful transition back to school and the community (Strnadová & Cumming 2016).

An important part of the transition process is pre-release planning, which includes the handover of records from juvenile justice centres to relevant stakeholders (for example, schools, vocational, health, and social services) (Nellis & Hooks Wayman 2009). Pre-release planning should involve all stakeholders, including the young person, the family, the juvenile justice educational unit, the receiving school, and any other organisations that will be involved with the youth post-release. Planning for post-release schooling is typically a group effort between the juvenile justice and education sectors. A pre-release visit to the receiving school prior to enrolment is recommended as good practice (Brock et al. 2008). This visit should include the young person, his or her family member/s and a representative from the juvenile justice centre or the transition specialist. This provides an opportunity for the young person to meet the teachers and the school leadership team, and become familiar with the school’s expectations and disciplinary procedures.

Noonan et al. (2012) used a mixed methods approach to examine changes in the collaboration patterns of a state transition team in the US, and identified key elements of successful interagency collaboration, including: (a) interagency collaboration is systematic and evolves over time; (b) cross-agency training opportunities are available; (c) the interagency transition team meets regularly (ideally on a monthly basis); and (d) team building is an integral part of the interagency transition team. Slaughter (2010) further highlighted the importance of setting up appropriate wraparound services (that is, individualised services based on the student’s strengths, challenges and needs). Planned comprehensive services must be properly managed, with well-defined roles and responsibilities (Brock et al 2008), yet the provision of services is often uncoordinated and/or duplicated (Dickerson, Collins-Camargo & Martin-Galijatovic 2012).

Green, Rockhill and Burrus (2008) identified barriers to successful collaboration via a qualitative study that was conducted with 104 representatives across three systems in the US. These barriers included: (1) providers’ mistrust and a lack of understanding of other agencies perspectives; (2) confidentiality concerns; (3) logistical and resource concerns; (4) turnover among providers; and (5) time pressure. Although their study was based on systems involved in supporting families affected by substance abuse, these barriers are easily applied to the
collaboration among systems involved in the transition of young people out of juvenile justice back into the community. How these issues apply to juvenile justice is explained briefly below.

Mistrust and misunderstanding among agencies is often due to differences in each agency’s focus, philosophies or goals, and a lack of understanding of each other’s roles and responsibilities (O’Neill, Strnadová & Cumming 2017; Gonsoulin & Read 2011). For example, the juvenile justice and education systems have different goals regarding incarcerated youth, and this may prevent them from seeing eye-to-eye on treatment, transition, and the key areas addressed in exit plans. Systems are often reluctant to share information due to confidentiality issues (Gonsoulin & Read 2011). A good example of this is when the young person needs to be enrolled into a school in the community. Tensions may arise as the school in the juvenile justice centre may feel that disclosing certain pieces of information might disadvantage the young person in the new school setting, and the receiving school in the community may feel that it needs the information to effectively support the young person educationally, socially and behaviourally.

A lack of resources can contribute directly to difficulties in collaboration. For example, treatment providers may be unable to attend case planning meetings because of time and funding constraints (Green et al. 2008). This interferes with the success of any type of collaborative system of care, such as transition planning and/or wraparound services. For collaboration to be successful, all parties must meet and communicate on a regular basis (Slaughter 2010). Limited financial resources may also contribute to low salaries, which can contribute to high staff turnover rates. This can pose a barrier to collaboration, as effective collaboration requires positive working relationships to develop across cases and time (Slaughter 2010). Time, as a resource, can also be an issue in juvenile justice transitions, as young people can be released from custody with little prior warning (O’Neill, Strnadová & Cumming 2017). This can result in important stakeholders’ absence from exit case conferences.

The Australian context

According to the latest report on youths in detention in Australia by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2015), in the June quarter, an average of 885 young people were detained in juvenile justice centres either serving a custodial sentence (55%, n=488) or awaiting trial (45%, n=398). As a percentage, those in detention represent 16 per cent of the total number of young people under supervision by juvenile justice authorities nationwide. The majority of young people serving custodial sentences were male (94%), with 66 per cent aged 10–17 years. Young people from an Indigenous background account for 54 per cent of young people aged 10–17 in detention, which equates to 34 in 10,000, despite only comprising 3 per cent of the population. The recidivism rate for young offenders in Australia ranged between 51–71 per cent (Kasinathan 2015). Similar to other developed nations, many young offenders in Australia re-offend within the first six months, with the youngest and those from an Indigenous background most likely to re-offend (Indig et al. 2016). Over the past four years, the number of young people serving custodial sentences declined between 2011 and 2015 from 1.6 to 1.2 in 10,000. In New South Wales (‘NSW’), the most populous state in Australia where this study was conducted, an average of 168 young people were in custody on any one night for the June 2015 quarter.

Research on the transitions of Australian youth in custody back to the community are relatively scarce. Although there are accounts of issues experienced by youth that mention poor interagency collaboration (see Dawes 2011; Halsey 2007; Mendes, Snow & Baidawi
2014), who is involved in the development of transition plans is not well explicated. Others have proposed an interdisciplinary discharge planning model to alleviate some of the collaboration issues that impact on the health needs of youths in detention as they return to the community (Jarvis, Beale & Martin 2000). The model proposed by Jarvis et al. (2000) included a community liaison coordinator to facilitate interagency collaboration, but did not outline the roles or responsibilities of other stakeholders in NSW.

There is also a scarcity of departmental or external reports into transition planning and processes for this population. To improve information sharing between agencies, some youth justice departments in Australia are entering into Memoranda of Understanding (‘MOUs’). For example, in 2014–15, a MOU was signed between the NSW Department of Education (‘NSW DoE’) and the NSW Department of Juvenile Justice (‘NSW DJJ’) to facilitate educational assessments and planning that included educational or vocational pathways for youths in custody (NSW DJJ 2015). A MOU was also signed between NSW DJJ and Family and Community Services. Such agreements have arisen out of reviews of effective practices in the juvenile justice (see Noetic Solutions 2010) where whole-of-government collaboration was recommended.

The Australian study

The present study investigated the transition process for youth incarcerated in juvenile justice centres for three or more months in NSW, Australia. This was accomplished by examining the transition process from the stance of both the education and juvenile justice systems. This article focuses on a part of this study, specifically on collaboration and communication between the agencies involved, as well as on the extent to which the key elements of successful interagency collaboration apply to these two agencies during the transition of incarcerated youth back to the community. The following research questions guided this part of the study:

1. What are the roles and understanding of staff in each sector with reference to the transition process?
2. How do the agencies involved with the transition planning for incarcerated youth collaborate?

Methodology and research design

Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework guiding this study was the Taxonomy for Transition Programming (Kohler 1993; Kohler et al. 1994; Rusch, Kohler & Hughes 1992). The Taxonomy for Transition Planning is based on the understanding that transition involves all possible adult roles, responsibilities, settings and activities. One of the strengths of this conceptual framework is that it focuses on the process of transition, rather than only on transition outcomes. The five key aspects of the transition process according to this model are: (1) student-focused planning; (2) student development; (3) interagency and interdisciplinary collaboration; (4) family involvement; and (5) program structure and attributes.
Participants and research settings

The research study took place in six NSW rural and urban juvenile justice facilities. These facilities each have an onsite school run by the NSW DoE called an ‘education and training unit’. These schools provide education to young people of mandatory school age serving custodial sentences. There were 44 participants in this study, 22 females and 22 males. The age of participants ranged from 30–64 years, with an average age of 47 years. For more details about the participants, please see Table 1. The conducted interviews ranged in length from 9:55 minutes to 80:59 minutes, with an average length of 35:44 minutes.

Table 1: Participants interviewed across the six juvenile justice centres (‘JJC’s’)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>JJC’s</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principal at ETU</td>
<td>6 (1 from each centre)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant principal at ETU</td>
<td>3 (from 3 centres)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher at ETU</td>
<td>7 (from 5 centres)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher’s aide at ETU</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School counsellor at ETU</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School transition specialist at ETU</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juvenile justice centre (JJC) manager</td>
<td>6 (from 5 centres)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant JJC manager</td>
<td>4 (from 3 centres)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JJC psychologist</td>
<td>2 (from 2 centres)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JJC unit manager</td>
<td>2 (from 1 centre)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant JJC unit manager</td>
<td>2 (from 2 centres)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justice health community integration team clinician</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO representative</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JJ officer</td>
<td>3 (from 3 centres)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth officer</td>
<td>2 (from 1 centre)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream school principal</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream school teacher</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>44</strong></td>
</tr>
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*Note: ETU = Education and Training Unit, NGO = non-government organisation*

Research process

Ethical clearance was sought and obtained from the researchers’ institutional research review board, the NSW DoE research branch, and the NSW DJJ research department. The researchers then contacted the six principals of the education and training units and managers of the six juvenile justice centres via email and invited them and their personnel to participate in the study. This email included an information letter explaining the purpose of the study, the anticipated time required of participants, perceived outcomes of the study, ethical clearance and withdrawal information, as well as the researchers’ contact details.

The participants of this study met with the researchers at a mutually convenient time. The participants were asked a series of questions about the transition planning process for incarcerated young people of mandatory school age, with a focus on interagency collaboration during this process. The authors developed interview protocols with semi-structured interview questions, grounded in a literature review conducted by the authors and following Kohler’s Taxonomy of Transition Programming. The interviews were audio-recorded with the participants’ permission, transcribed verbatim, and analysed using an inductive content analysis approach (Elo & Kyngäs 2008).
The interview transcriptions created the units of analysis. In accordance with Graneheim and Lundman (2004, p. 106), a coding unit was words, sentences or paragraphs ‘containing aspects related to each other through their content and context’. The first author and a research assistant independently coded two interviews. The second author compared the coded interviews, and the whole research team met and discussed any differences. The research assistant then conducted open coding (that is, coding transcribed interviews) for all transcribed interviews. The first author went through all coded interviews and suggested changes/adjustments to some of the codes. The research team repeatedly met, discussed and resolved any differences. In the next stage of coding, the researchers created sub-categories \( n=286 \), which were then aggregated into exhaustive categories (Graneheim & Lundman 2004). By linking the underlying meanings in categories, and aggregating these to sub-themes, the researchers derived seven key themes: (1) Transition plans; (2) Transition planning process; (3) Youth assessment; (4) Interagency collaboration; (5) Incarcerated youth; (6) Education at juvenile justice centres; (7) Juvenile justice centre. The theme ‘Interagency collaboration’, which consisted of seven categories and 41 sub-categories, is discussed in this article.

There were several measures used to ensure credibility, validity and trustworthiness of the process (Brantlinger et al. 2005; Whittemore, Chase & Mandle 2001). The authors and a research assistant used investigator triangulation in every stage of data analysis. The authors also looked for disconfirming evidence once they established preliminary categories and themes, and did not find any. They utilised a peer debriefing approach when discussing results with several colleagues familiar with the studied area. This article provides a thick detailed description by reporting sufficient quotes to provide evidence for the authors’ conclusions.

**Results**

Participants in each sector described their roles (Table 2); however, these roles were not always clearly understood across sectors, as elaborated below. The interagency collaboration included collaboration with mainstream schools, transition-focused staff, community, services for youth released from juvenile justice, youth’s families, as well as collaboration between educational and juvenile justice departments of juvenile justice centres.

**Table 2: Roles of individuals involved in transition of young people involved in the juvenile justice system**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Juvenile justice centre personnel</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unit Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Has the primary casework coordinating role</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Allocates a youth officer (key worker) to the young person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Organises case conferences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Contact between the Centre and the community case worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Acts as the case worker and the manager of the unit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Manages young person’s plan while in custody (entry, exit, and the plan implementation)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Responsible for ensuring that the key worker is implementing all elements of the case plan</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Co-develops exit (transition) plan</td>
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<tr>
<td>Role</td>
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</table>
| Assistant Unit Manager      | - Chairs the case conference  
                            - Oversees all aspects from entry                                                |
| Youth Officer (Key Worker)  | - Allocated staff member to a young person on the unit who the young person is directed to go to if they have any issues or need anything followed up.  
                            - Programs and activities supervisor (offending behaviour, sport and recreation supervisor)  
                            - Acts as admissions officer, asks young person a wide range of questions, then passes that information on to relevant stakeholders  
                            - Makes referrals to services such as health or mental health  
                            - Enrols young person into school  
                            - Assists in finding job agencies to link with  
                            - Organises the exit conference with all of the stakeholders  
                            - Listens to young people and offers advice  
                            - Passes information to the unit manager and the assistant unit manager |
| Psychologist                | - Attends the initial interviews  
                            - Assesses counselling needs  
                            - Provides counselling  
                            - Find agencies to deliver counselling outside area of expertise  
                            - Performs risk assessment  
                            - Writes reports for parole, Serious Young Offenders Review Panel, etc  
                            - Works with staff about any concerns that surface  
                            - Attends the case conferences  
                            - Exchanges information with unit staff  
                            - Identifies risk factors for the young person’s re-offending  
                            - Works on reducing the young person’s risk of re-offending  
                            - Conducts relapse prevention programs  
                            - Provides unit staff with information from the transition meeting with the school about things the young person is interested in in terms of work or further education, and provides them with contact details for those options |
| Juvenile justice community-based personnel | - Attends discharge case conference  
                                   - Allocates a community case worker to the young person  
                                   - Oversees the case work  
                                   - Meets with case workers every month to discuss each young person (current status, barriers, progress, exit plan)  
                                   - Ensures that plans are being adhered to and that staff are following the process |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Responsibilities</th>
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| Community Manager                             | • Conducts risk assessments for criminogenic needs  
• Works across domains (accommodation, education, health, community agencies), particularly high-risk domains directly related to their offending  
• Writes an integration (transition) plan  
• Makes referrals to funded services to support some of these domains  
• Provides supervision if there is a legal mandate |
| Juvenile Justice Officer (Community Officer)  | • Involved in re-integration from the day young person comes into contact with the agency  
• Focus on rehabilitation in both the community and the Centre  
• Addresses youths’ criminogenic needs |
| Community Case Worker                         | • Responsible for and provides support to the young person, in custody and the community  
• Maintains the case management of the young person  
• Has regular contact with the young person and the family during custody  
• Reviews young person’s progress while in custody monthly with the assistant manager  
• Responsible for the overall community integration  
• Implements integration (transition) plan  
• Refers the young people to different organisations in communities  
• Arranges for community support  
• Supervises young person’s adherence to plan in the areas of school, health, employment, family and community integration, and recreation  
• Supervises post-release orders such as probation and parole |
| Justice Health                                | • Monitors and treats ongoing health concerns  
• Liaises with unit staff to discuss medication, upcoming appointments |
| Justice Health Community Integration Team Clinician | • Attends discharge case conference  
• Supports young person in health follow-up (mental health or alcohol and drug treatment)  
• Helps the young person attend appointments, make referrals, or obtain medication through visiting a general practitioner  
• Assists with transport to the doctor, chemist, etc |
| Education and Training Unit (‘ETU’) personnel | • Attends review meetings  
• Drives information from the top down  
• Leads improvement measures in the school plan  
• Ensures that Juvenile Justice are aware of the ETU’s direction |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Responsibilities</th>
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| ETU Assistant Principal          | Sends information to case conferences  
|                                  | Shares information about the student at school in terms of educational outputs,  
|                                  | achievement, and behaviour                                                       |
| ETU Principal                    | Often is the transition officer  
|                                  | Coordinates the entire transition  
|                                  | Conducts pre- and post-testing with students  
|                                  | Does the initial interview, and immediately begins the conversation about transition  
|                                  | Contacts students’ home schools, and outside support agencies such as their Juvenile Justice officers, to make sure that planning is holistic |
| Transition Specialist (Officer)  | Liaises with Juvenile Justice and young people  
|                                  | Liaises with outside agencies to set up a plan for when they exit the Centre  
|                                  | Presents necessary information to staff in relation to transition  
|                                  | Collaborates with students, teachers, and executive staff about transition  
|                                  | Coordinates the information for the database  
|                                  | Organises and takes students out to the community on excursions  
|                                  | Completes paperwork and attends case conferences |
| ETU Classroom Teacher            | Conducts induction  
|                                  | Negotiates with the student to create a personalised learning plan (‘PLP’) that includes the student’s goals and aspirations  
|                                  | Consults with the student each week to review plan and progress  
|                                  | Builds students’ self-esteem by allowing them to experience success |
| ETU Aboriginal Education Officer | Liaises with students in the programs’ induction phase  
|                                  | Assists with the PLP  
|                                  | Travels around classrooms to support Indigenous students |
| SLSO (School Learning Support Officer) | Assists teaching staff within the classroom  
|                                  | Partners with the classroom teacher in terms of behaviour management, curriculum and organisation |
| Learning and Wellbeing Officer   | Locates and facilitates placement for students with disabilities  
|                                  | Meets with all the stakeholders and attends placement meetings |
| Indigenous Tutors                | Support the learning of Indigenous students  
|                                  | Communicate with students one-on-one about future goals  
|                                  | Assess students  
|                                  | Work on literacy and numeracy skills with students |
There are numerous stakeholders across diverse sectors involved in transitioning incarcerated youth back to the community. Personnel within the DJJ have a range of roles in the transition process, from the collection of information that informs exit plans, to the coordination of services post-release. Youth officers work most closely with the young person. Each young person is assigned a youth officer, whose role is to frequently communicate with the young person: '[I]t’s my role just to listen, and offer advice, because you always get asked advice. … To encourage the young person to ask questions of their family. Are they going to be happy having you back home?’ (P14KWJJC).

Youth officers feeds the information they glean from young people to their unit manager. The unit manager has the primary casework coordinating role, which includes assigning a youth officer to each young person, organising case conferences, and developing the exit plan (P9YO). They also serve as the contact between the Centre and the community case worker.

Another important stakeholder is the juvenile justice officer, who is assigned to every young person. Juvenile justice officers are based in the community and support youth post-release. As one of the participants commented, these officers ‘can often be hard to get a hold of, because they’re key to the plan as well, because they’re the ones that essentially have to implement it’ (P9YO). Unit managers provide contact between JJC’s and juvenile justice officers. A juvenile justice officer also meets monthly with the assistant manager of client services who oversees all case reviews and case conferences.
Other stakeholders include juvenile justice psychologists, who are involved in initial interviews, conduct risk assessments, and determine the type of counselling the young person might need, as well as who might be the best to deliver it, if it is out of their area of expertise. The participating psychologist described some aspects of this role: ‘My specific role as psychologist is more about identifying and working on reducing the young person’s risk of re-offending, so it’s about identifying what risk factors there are, and coming up with options for the young person to stay away from those risk factors’ (P22PJJC).

The ETUs belong to the Department of Education, and most have an appointed transition teacher who liaises with incarcerated youth, juvenile justice personnel, and outside agencies relevant to education (for example, high schools, distance education providers, Technical and Further Education (‘TAFE’)). Many times the assistant principals of the ETUs act as the transition specialist. The principal of the ETU attends review meetings and sends information about the student to case conferences in terms of educational outputs, achievement and behaviour. Other stakeholders involved in the transition process are ETU teachers, justice health community integration team clinicians, and TAFE career advisors, to name a few.

**Understanding of roles across sectors**

It was clear that although most participants from each sector were clear about their role and the role of others in their sector, this was not the case across sectors:

There’s no specific framework that I’m aware of that says the Department of Education should do this for a kid, Juvenile Justice should do this for a person, Justice Health should do this for someone else, non-government agencies who are offering post-release support should do this for the kid … everyone doesn’t know what they’re doing (P5TETU).

I’d just like to know what we are supposed to do, what we’re allowed to do, and whose job it is to do it. So who has that main responsibility … I just want to know what my role should be, and when I should be doing these things (P6RPETU).

Another example is that of the transition officer; in most cases the transition officer was a teacher at a JJC, with a two-day-per-week workload allocation for transition planning. There was a lack of clarity about this position:

I really struggle to see what it is that they actually do, and I don’t know if that’s because there’s no formal protocol to follow; I don’t know if it’s the fact that every single kid, the transition is going to be vastly different so it’s really hard to put a structure in place for transition (P5TETU).

One participant called for an end to the overlap of services among the sectors, suggesting that others look at what juvenile justice does first, then go from there (P25NGOR). It was apparent that improvement was still needed in this area.

**Collaboration between JJC personnel and mainstream school personnel**

Collaboration with mainstream schools was discussed by the majority of participants (n=31, 70.5%). Participants discussed both positive and negative experiences with collaboration during the transition planning process. Eight participants shared ways in which they tried to collaborate with others to support the transition of incarcerated youth back to mainstream schooling. These included collaboration between the ETUs and mainstream schools to enable part-time enrolment in a mainstream school, given that incarcerated youth were not used to full-time study:
I always recommend that they don’t go full time back into school, because our school is — you know, we only do an hour, we have a break; we do an hour, we have a break. … [S]o, we only do four real hours of school, and so I sort of suggest that they have an alternative program to go to, or maybe they go to school part-time and work part-time (P44TETU).

Other exemplary practices included having a support person accompany a young person returning to school; collaboration to organise the young person meeting the mainstream school personnel via audio-visual link-up; the young person and his or her family visiting the mainstream school; and/or mainstream school teachers visiting an ETU at the JJC. The latter assisted primarily with a better understanding of what students’ education at a juvenile justice looks like, which often helped to change misconceptions about schooling of incarcerated youth. As one participant elaborated:

[B]ut if I can get the staff in here to see what they can actually achieve in here, and I’ve done that for two students, and I think it’s worked really well, and those teachers were really impressed, and they actually got to see the best side of that child, which they’d probably never seen before, because the kid’s always been on drugs, or wagging, or getting into trouble at the school (P44TETU).

There were a number of issues related to collaboration experienced by education personnel in the JJC, such as limited possibilities to share information with mainstream schools, either from previous schools, or to schools which they were enrolling in post-release. Juvenile justice and education staff had mixed experiences with receiving relevant information from previous schools upon youths’ enrolment in JJC. These experiences ranged from satisfaction, to late receipt of requested information, to receiving no information at all: ‘It just depends on who’s the school counsellor at the school, so sometimes it will take up to two weeks, up to a month, and sometimes the boys are even gone by the time we receive those files’ (P33PETU).

The participants also discussed barriers to collaborating with mainstream schools during the process of preparing incarcerated youth for release back into the community. While issues with information sharing are understandable from the perspective of protecting young people’s confidential personal data, limited information available for sharing can also affect the quality of collaboration between the two entities. In some cases, the collaboration in this area was positive, thanks to parents and young people who gave their permission to share information.

If a young person had a disability, such as a mild intellectual disability (‘IM’), the process of information sharing became more complex. The participants highlighted how longer lead-in time is important for successful transition back to mainstream or special school:

[S]o if the student has, you know, an IM sign-off or something like that, and you want to put them in an IM class, that process — they only meet once a term, so therefore you’ve got to put the access request in, wait until Week 8 each term or whatever, and then put an interim support plan in place while they’re waiting for a placement, which they may not get (P13PRS).

Thus, more frequent meetings at the school level would be needed to facilitate successful transition from the centre back to school in the community.

**Collaboration between JJC personnel and ETU personnel**

Both the DJJ and DoE personnel within JJC mentioned positive aspects of collaboration between these two sectors. A common practice was holding weekly case planning meetings, to which education personnel were invited. Information was shared across both sectors, though some participants mentioned a lack of clarity about their and other stakeholders’ roles.
The participants also complained about a lack of communication between these two departments, which seemed to be compounded by a lack of clarity about the roles of individual stakeholders, as well as agencies. Another issue was that different terminology about the same things/issues or processes was used by juvenile justice personnel and educational personnel (for example, exit plans and transition plans), which could lead to confusion and misunderstanding.

**Collaboration between JJC\textsc{es} and transition-focused staff**

Half of the participants described collaboration between JJC\textsc{es} and transition-focused personnel who were based in the community. Some JJC\textsc{es} had a transition officer or transition advisor, who was in contact with youth services, and transition-focused personnel based in the community. The transition officers who participated in this study were mainly concerned about their allocated workload, which they felt did not allow sufficient time for collaboration in regards to transition planning, contacting relevant services and agencies, and developing transition plans:

[T]here’s kids I miss, and then I feel really bad. This kid that people are ringing me about, then I feel like an idiot, and I feel like I’ve let that kid down because I haven’t had that chance to talk with him, and then make a plan for him, so then I have let him down because he doesn’t have that plan (P44TETU).

Having an allocated transition officer also meant a reduction in face-to-face teaching, which was perceived as problematic: ‘[A] transition adviser costs the school 0.4 of a position, so actually the school is actually paying for the privilege of having a transition adviser, so we’re losing face-to-face teaching because of that’ (P40PETU).

Juvenile justice centres and ETUs collaborated with juvenile justice officers, who were assigned to a young person post-release if the young person had a parole period to serve in the community. The importance of this collaboration was highlighted by one of the participants: ‘[W]e have no mandate to follow them into the community, so that communication can happen through the juvenile justice officer, through the case worker’ (P17PETU). They are also important in the collaboration with a young person’s family. Similar to transition officers, the caseload juvenile justice officers were assigned was seen as too heavy, resulting in a compromised quality of services provided to young people.

One of the problems experienced by JJC\textsc{es} when collaborating with juvenile justice officers was their attendance at case conferences due to their heavy workloads. Some participants also commented on the diverse quality of juvenile justice officers: ‘[S]ome JJO’s are very good at their job. They no sooner realise that in doing transition the ones that are really helpful and very supportive — and there’s some really bad ones out there. They don’t care. They’re just going through the motions’ (P15PETU).

Juvenile justice centres also closely collaborated with justice health community integration team clinicians (‘JHCITCs’), whose role was to support young people up to three months post-release with matters such as health (including mental health). This support could be extended for another three months, if necessary.

**Collaboration between JJC\textsc{es} and youth services**

Almost half of the participants described ways in which JJC\textsc{es} collaborated with relevant services for youth. Juvenile justice centres matched services with young people’s support needs. From the experience of one of the participants, it was crucial to link a young person returning back to the community to as many agencies as possible: ‘[P]retty much right from
Day One we like to link them up with as many agencies or support networks as we can, because these fellas can’t have enough support’ (P30AUM).

Unfortunately, the age of the young people was one of the barriers when connecting young people to services: ‘That’s probably the toughest thing I’m finding at the moment in the community, is: the kids that have turned 18, there’s not a lot of services out there, even though they’ve turned 18’ (P39JJO). Another barrier was the fact that incarcerated young people needed to be engaged to cooperate with youth services in the community, and these services often did not know how to engage with these young people, which has a negative effect on collaboration and successful transition: ‘My clients, who need support to attend appointments, they will close them off, never contact them, never follow up, and I’ve seen the stark difference, because my clients are very difficult to engage, to start with’ (P34JHCITC).

Finding out about relevant services for young people was an issue on its own. One of the common problems was that services lost funding and disappeared after a couple of years of service provision. This leaves JJC personnel in a cycle of searching for new service providers relevant to their incarcerated youth transitioning back to community.

Collaboration between JJC’s and families of young people

More than half of the participants (n=25, 56.8%) discussed their experiences of collaboration with incarcerated youths’ families. The participants were very appreciative of challenges faced by these families, such as feeling overwhelmed and ‘at their wit’s end’ in regard to bringing up their child. Some participants shared their approach to family-centred collaboration, such as building rapport with families, working in ways that are appropriate for individual families, and considering families’ cultural background. The participants agreed that some families needed to be empowered, as they ‘feel worthless and feel they don’t have the capacity to engage their children in a way that can stop them from offending’ (P34JHCITC).

While many young people want to return home, some youths’ family homes were not perceived as positive environments conducive to collaboration, successful inclusion, and maintenance of a young person in their community:

Lack of structure within the home, a lot of parents who became disengaged themselves from the education system at a young age and probably don’t see the importance of it, having difficulty managing themselves … 67% of our kids have either one or both parents within the Corrections — within prison (P33PETU).

Family involvement was especially important during exit conferences. According to the participants, families are usually not involved in preparing the agenda for the exit conferences. They are encouraged to participate, either in person, via teleconference or phone. The flexibility in the mode of participation is crucial, given that some families live in rural or remote areas that are more than four hours away from the JJC’s. However, involving families in exit conferences via phone has its downfalls:

Having it done by phone is really difficult. I don’t know what the answer is there, but having it by phone is an absolute nightmare. Being in these regions and trying to have a conversation, and you’ve got people running around and you’re on a mobile phone on speaker, and because the family don’t have a phone, you know, and they’re kind of like, ‘Oh, what did they say?’ (P12JJO)

Thus there is an urgent need to look for other means of engagement of families living in rural and remote areas in exit conferences than phone.
Collaboration between JJC and the community

Only eight participants discussed collaboration between their centre and the community. This was usually a matter of collaborating with available services that could assist young people to return to the community. Two participants also discussed their centres’ efforts to increase collaboration by building community awareness and acceptance of youth who had been involved with juvenile justice. An example of this was having ‘open door days’ for the public, which, in the experience of a couple of participants, helped to reduce the stigma JJC and incarcerated youth often have in community. Another example was the development of an interschool sports program, with a local high school sports team coming to play with a juvenile justice sports team:

[I]t was the first time they’ve come in. And they were a bit apprehensive, as you can tell. So were the students, about coming over here, because they have boys at the moment who come from [high school], and they were worried, but they came in and had an absolutely fabulous day. … And I’m hoping that will help with transition as well (P15PETU).

This participant further commented: ‘[W]e want people to come in and just see that yeah, our boys do bad things, but in the end they’re just kids, and they’ve made bad choices. We’re trying to help them make better choices’ (P15PETU).

As obvious from these experiences, community involvement with JJC deserves more attention, as it has a potential to facilitate the transitions of incarcerated young people back to community.

Discussion

The research questions guiding this study were: (1) What are the roles and understanding of staff in each sector with reference to the transition process? (2) How do the agencies involved with the transition planning process for incarcerated youth collaborate?

In regard to the roles and understanding of staff in each sector with reference to the transition process, there was great variation in the perceived quality of the processes and the knowledge staff possessed of their own roles and the roles of others. There was also an element of defensiveness about how others perceived them as doing their job regarding transition, a tension also identified by Haight et al. (2014). Many of the participants expressed a lack of clarity around the role and responsibilities of the designated transition officer. The transition officers themselves expressed frustration with workload and not having enough time to perform their duties effectively. They also suggested that the context of the transition from juvenile justice to the community left them with an inability to follow up on students after their release.

Results from the data analysis identified numerous inter- and intra-agency collaborations experienced by NSW JJC. These included collaborations between JJC and other agencies/parties, such as schools, non-government organisations, communities, and families of incarcerated youth. All of these collaborations were complex, and time and resource demanding. Collaboration was especially challenging when it came to sharing information between JJC and mainstream schools. Participants expressed satisfaction with some aspects of collaboration between the NSW DoE and NSW DJJ personnel, such as regular meetings and sharing information, which sits under the interagency collaboration component of Kohler’s Taxonomy for Transition Programming (1996).
Participants viewed the roles of families and the community in supporting the youth upon release as important, and they suggested ways to improve these collaborations. Some of the suggestions for working with families included teaching young people to set boundaries within their families, building rapport with families, empowering families, approaching families in a culturally sensitive manner, and providing counselling for families. Many of these suggestions have been advocated in the research literature on collaborations for systems-involved youths (see Gonsoulin & Read 2011; Haight et al. 2014). Further, these suggestions are well aligned with Kohler’s Taxonomy for Transition Planning (1996).

Few participants mentioned collaboration with the community. This is in itself an indication that this area of collaboration requires closer consideration. Those that responded expressed that there was a need to collaborate more closely with community members and felt that this could be accomplished by building community awareness and acceptance by giving the community exposure to the centre and its activities. Hamilton, Hamilton and Pittman (2004) suggest that this exposure would help to build understanding, therefore reducing the stigma of youth who have been involved with the juvenile justice system and improve their transition outcomes.

Interagency collaboration is one of the five pillars for Kohler’s Taxonomy for Transition Planning. In order for interagency collaboration to be successful, it must have collaborative service delivery as well as a collaborative framework (Kohler 1996). While this study found that collaboration during the transition of incarcerated youths from NSW JJC’s had elements of both the recommended service delivery and framework components, others were still in the process of being implemented, or were not implemented consistently across centres and sectors. Coordinated information sharing and the dissemination of systems information was occurring, but its timeliness and quality appeared to be largely dependent on the specific individuals responsible in each system. Participants reported issues with effective collaboration between juvenile justice and the educational training units in regard to collaboration with community schools, families and the community.

Strengths and limitations of the study

The main strength of this study is in its qualitative nature; participants had the opportunity to voice their opinions, concerns, and suggestions for improvement. Another strength is the diversity of the participants, who were from various sectors, which allowed for in-depth insights about current state of interagency collaboration in NSW juvenile justice system, utilising multiple perspectives. As far as the authors could surmise, it is the first study of its kind undertaken in NSW that included participants from the juvenile justice system, education system, and the community, focusing on interagency collaboration. That being said, there were also limitations. Because this study was conducted with participants in NSW, Australia, caution should be exercised before generalising the results. Future studies should include all states in Australia and a larger number of participants, perhaps also employing quantitative data collection. There were also few participants in the community and community school sectors — future studies should aim for a balance of participants from the various systems. Last but not least, research is needed on how young incarcerated people negotiate collaborative practice.
Recommendations

The identified positive aspects of collaboration between the NSW DJJ and NSW DoE can likely be attributed to the 2014 MOU between these sectors. Similar efforts to develop MOUs with other agencies such as health could also increase effective collaboration. A more well-defined description of the roles of all involved stakeholders and sharing these across sectors is needed. As highlighted by Noonan et al. (2012), the availability of cross-agency training opportunities is one of the vital key elements of successful interagency collaboration. Such training opportunities would allow not only clarity about roles and responsibilities, but also shared terminology.

Specific procedures, including forms to be used in hard copy or electronic transmittal of records, would expedite the sharing of information among sectors. Establishing common parental permission document(s) for the release of information to permit agencies outside of MOUs to share information (and encouraging parents to sign them) would also improve efficiency and effectiveness. Creating a policy to establish in writing the prescribed number of business days one entity has between receipt of the request for records and their provision would also assist in improving information sharing, as would an interagency database that merges data from each agency. To protect young people’s confidentiality, the database could be set up to provide access to information on an as-needed basis. This would ensure that a variety of agencies had access to necessary information about educational needs, discipline history and transition plans (Gonsoulin & Read 2011).

A consolidated case management framework that encompasses effective communication and partnerships among education, juvenile justice, mental health and families may result in a more streamlined collaborative approach to transition and supervision, decreased recidivism, and better educational outcomes for students (Gonsoulin & Read 2011). Commonly known as ‘wraparound services’, such a framework entails all agencies working together and contributing resources to support the transition of the young person back to the community (Gagnon, Rockwell & Scott 2008; Mathur & Schoenfeld 2010). In order for wraparound services to be effective, points of contact across agencies must be identified, cross-agency training on wraparound services should be conducted, and an evaluation plan to determine progress and success should be established (Slaughter 2010).

There exist examples of successful collaborative case management programs. For example, Haight et al. (2014) describe the Crossover Youth Practice Model, a multisystem collaboration between the child welfare and juvenile justice systems that aimed to increase the success of case management for incarcerated youth. The model included three phases that stretched from arrest and identification of youth, dual case management and planning, and ongoing case management and planning for case closure. Practices implemented within the phases included developing information-sharing protocols and confidentiality MOUs, development of a multidisciplinary team that included the youth and family, and partnering of agencies to secure support in the areas of mental health, employment, housing, health care, and education. The implementation of the model resulted in increased professional support and strengthened relationships among professionals in different sectors. Professionals also reported positive changes in their perceptions and feelings about incarcerated youth and their families.

Other sectors in NSW are currently trialling a web-based team collaboration app called Patchwork. It is a secure system that aims to connect frontline workers in the areas of social care, mental health, homelessness, domestic violence and child protection with other practitioners across agencies (Patchwork NSW n.d.). Patchwork is a practitioner information-sharing system, so does not share information about clients, other than to provide the contact
information of other practitioners involved with the client. This allows practitioners to obtain a full picture of who is working with each client and provides them with the opportunity to build a collaborative network to better support each client. Such a system might be a step towards improving collaboration across sectors and building a multi-systemic framework of support for young people transitioning out of JJCs back to the community.

Conclusion

The data analysis of the interviews conducted revealed that steps in the right direction are being taken to ensure that effective collaborations were occurring regarding transitions of young people from juvenile justice settings back to the community. However, there is still much to be done. A single-case management system (Kohler 1996) within a wraparound system of support (Slaughter 2010) would improve communication, information sharing and collaboration, ensuring that each young person’s case was effectively managed.

Acknowledgments and funding

The authors wholeheartedly thank all study participants for their commitment and time spent on the interviews. Their passion for incarcerated youths’ improved life outcomes is truly inspirational.

The authors would like to express their gratitude to the NSW DoE and the NSW DJJ for supporting and cofunding this study. It evidences their commitment to improving the services they provide to incarcerated youth and demonstrates their intention to effectively collaborate to ensure that evidence-based transition practices are incorporated across both sectors.

This work was supported by the NSW DoE, the NSW DJJ, and the University of New South Wales School of Education.
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