



South Lanarkshire Structured Deferred Sentencing Evaluation

includem 

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Background

Structured Deferred Sentencing (SDS) offered to people after they've been found guilty of a crime, but before they're sentenced. The goal is to help keep people out of prison and give them a chance to fix the issues that led them to commit a crime. After conviction, they're given time to receive support and address any issues that may have led them to be in conflict with the law. If they don't come into conflict with the law during this period, they might receive a lighter sentence or, in some cases, no punishment at all. Since 2004, several trials of SDS have been run across Scotland, including in South Lanarkshire in 2018.

The [South Lanarkshire SDS Pilot](#) (henceforth referred to as the “2018 Pilot”) was designed to support young people, aged 16-21, who were involved in the criminal justice system. The programme aimed to help these individuals find better paths by offering personalised, intensive support to reduce reoffending and improve their chances of getting jobs. A key part of this initiative was ensuring that the young people had access to eight third-sector organisations, including those specialising in education, housing, and wellbeing. These organisations worked together to offer a full package of care, creating a network of support that gave each individual the best chance at success and re-integration into their community.

The South Lanarkshire SDS Pilot was a clear success, demonstrating strong results in helping young people to reduce offending and improve their lives. With a high completion rate of 84%, and 91% of participants not reoffending during the programme, the intervention outperformed other community-based sentences like Community Payback Orders (CPO). The key to its success lay in its welfare-led approach, which focused on addressing the underlying needs and challenges that contributed to offending. By offering personalised support, from housing to mental health services, the programme helped young people build trust in the system and gain the skills they needed to make positive changes.

Crucially, this success was made possible by the collaboration between the social work team, courts, and various support organisations. This approach not only benefited the young people involved but also reduced the burden on courts. The pilot highlighted the importance of expanding welfare-based interventions in Scotland to improve outcomes for young people in the justice system. The exact costings of the South Lanarkshire SDS Pilot have not yet been completed, but previous SDS Pilots in Scotland showed that the SDS is much cheaper than alternatives. The cost per SDS case averaged £2,562 for a six-month period, whereas the cost of custody per case over the same period was £14,451 and the cost per case for secure care was £130,000.

Despite these successes, funding to continue the SDS service (in the form it took during the pilot) was not extended. The 2018 Pilot was funded through the Employability, Innovation, and Integration fund from the Scottish Government which operated until 31 March 2019. The £220,000 received by South Lanarkshire council was not renewed and the SDS service took on another form. This situation was predicted in a [CYCJ case study](#) of the pilot which noted: “this is not a long-term stable service. There is a need nationally to redistribute CPO funding to services such as this.”

SDS in South Lanarkshire is now supported by the Whole Systems Approach (WSA) team, which was created out of the success of the 2018 Pilot. Recognising the benefits of providing multiagency

support, South Lanarkshire Council created the WSA team to better facilitate a range of services, such as bail support, diversion from prosecution, and CPOs. In its current form, the SDS service for young people in South Lanarkshire has less dedicated referral pathways and is instead supported by the WSA team. Compared to the 2018 Pilot, this has impacted the ease with which young people can access the support they need. Additionally, there are fewer third-sector organisations involved, reducing the variety and breadth of services available. SDS now relies more heavily on existing relationships rather than dedicated support, which can affect the consistency and quality of support provided. Furthermore, the Multi Agency Steering Group no longer exists, which has diminished the level of coordinated oversight and strategic planning for the programme.

Method

Purpose of includem's SDS Pilot

The data from the 2018 Pilot showed very high rates of positive outcomes. The 2018 Pilot used eight organisations, each specialising in a specific area. With the conclusion of this pilot, South Lanarkshire created the WSA team to expand multiagency work throughout Youth Justice Social Work. The key differences between the 2018 Pilot and the WSA team are the number of organisations that young people can refer into, and the number of services covered. Where the 2018 Pilot was able to refer into eight agencies from a single SDS service, the WSA team use two organisations across multiple services.

The purpose of includem's SDS Pilot was to test whether an intensive support organisation can improve the outcomes of young people whose needs exceed the capacity of the WSA team. This pilot tested whether an organisation offering intensive, whole family support can offer support in all areas while signposting to more specialist services when needed. The gap that was identified by includem was related to resourcing and capacity. Funding is being slashed across all local authorities in Scotland with many services reaching breaking point. The research conducted for includem's ADAPT project found that 89.4% of all organisations working with children and young people are facing serious resourcing issues. Includem's SDS Pilot with South Lanarkshire council investigated where the tipping point is between resourcing and delivering a service that works. Can a single organisation provide adequate support for young people with the highest level of need? This pilot would not only test where the tipping point is, but would provide an accurate picture of what a sustainable and effective service would look like in the current climate of funding cuts and budget restraints.

Another potential benefit of using this approach was the consistency it would provide for young people. This would fit with the recommendations of [the 2018 Pilot's evaluation](#) that suggested that "fixed staffing" would strengthen the relationships between support staff and young people. By having one organisation providing the bulk of the support, young people would have more opportunities to work with a familiar face, which would then lead to better engagement. The aforementioned [CYCJ case study](#) also recommended that the SDS criteria is expanded from 16-21 to 16-25. The includem pilot accepted this recommendation and set the upper limit for the age of the young people as 25 years of age.

A modification that could not be made is the use of CPOs for young people on an SDS. The evaluation of the 2018 Pilot made clear that "CPOs and SDS should not be run concurrently." This is because:

The level of flexibility in SDS can only occur due to the voluntary nature of the process. With a compulsory order, such as a CPO, engagement is a fixed process with little flexibility in terms of compliance, and if breached results in secondary offending which is what happened with those cases in SDS.

However, multiple young people who took part in this SDS Pilot were also on a CPO.

Service Design

- Referrals came from the Whole Systems Approach team.
- Normal referral process - referral form completed by allocated SW then follow up referral meeting with social work and team manager.
- Young people received 2 visits per week - this included parent/carers support where appropriate. They also had access to the 24/7 helpline.
- Referrals could be open for up to 6 months - in line with average length of deferred sentence.
- Regular contact between worker and allocated social worker.
- Capacity meetings every 4/6 weeks with Team Manager and social work team leader.
- includem model used - support plan created with young people and reviewed in line with model - ABL use linked to achieving goals.

Evaluation

Includem staff recorded each young person's data through the in-house case management system, MAPS. This included personal details, assessment information (such as Wellbeing Webs and CRIME PICS II), and engagement with ABL modules. Workers also used MAPS to create detailed visit notes, which documented conversations with young people, session evaluations, progress monitoring, areas of concern, and other key insights. Staff from South Lanarkshire Social Work and includem, including team managers and delivery workers, participated in interviews to share their experiences of the pilot. Questions focused on the delivery process, inter-organisational communication, relationships with young people, and areas for improvement. These interviews contextualised and reinforced the MAPS data allowing for a deeper understanding of the pilot's implementation. Due to the number of young people who took part in the SDS Pilot and the level of engagement, a thematic analysis was performed on case notes and interview data. The findings of the thematic analysis were then used to structure a narrative analysis of each young person's journey through the pilot.

The nature of the ADAPT Project means that not only is service delivery being evaluated, but so too is the design of the service being piloted. Using the aforementioned interview data, internal project management documents, and minutes from Steering Group meetings, the design of the pilot will be evaluated. This includes evaluating the communications process within includem, the design process, the referral pathway, the sustainability of the pilot, and so on. Combining the two elements of the pilot (the service delivery and the service design) will provide a detailed picture of the pilot's success and will allow for a much more precise understanding of where improvements need to be made and the barriers that might prevent the implementations of these improvements.

Names of the participants have been changed to protect their identities. Any identifiable information, such as names of parents, places of work, etc., have also been removed. The pseudonyms used in this evaluation are: Nick, Julia, Craig, Charlotte, Katy, Nicola, Rowan, and Taylor.

Findings

Service Delivery

A thematic analysis of the case notes entered into MAPS, the data entered into each assessment, and from interviews with delivery staff revealed seven themes:

- **Structure:** the establishment of routines and supportive frameworks that help young people to develop consistency in their lives.
- **Employment:** aspirations and efforts towards gaining employment, including support in job applications and career planning.
- **Family:** impact of familial relationships well-being, addressing both supportive and complex family dynamics.
- **Relationships:** the role of social connections in a young person's life, including the importance of building healthy relationships and overcoming negative peer influences.
- **Goal Setting:** the process of establishing and pursuing personal goals.
- **Attitudes Towards Offending:** how each young person perceived their offending behaviour through each stage of their support.
- **No Contact or Limited Contact:** the challenges faced by young people who had little to no engagement with the SDS Pilot, including the barriers to accessing support.

These themes not only allow for a clearer presentation of the data, but also allow for a thorough examination of the relationship between each young person and their experience with the SDS Pilot. Each theme reflects the journeys of the supported young people, including the nuances of their personal circumstances, the broader social context in shaping their lives, and the person-centred support they received. While some of the themes do overlap, such as when a young person's goal is to gain employment, the way that each theme interacts with each young person's life requires that each theme is analysed individually.

Structure

An essential component of a structured deferred sentence is the structure. While the support is carefully structured, the end goal should be to introduce structure to the lives of the young people on an SDS. The SDS Pilot utilised includem's model of practice to support participants by providing them with routines for daily life. For Rowan, includem delivery staff helped him to develop a personalised weekly planner. This enabled Rowan to manage his time more effectively and to identify any gaps where pro-social activities could be integrated. The weekly planner also helped Rowan to stay on top of his bills which he had previously struggled to organise. Rowan also struggled to maintain a habit of eating at regular mealtimes. This meant that he would sometimes lose a lot of weight between visits. He expressed a desire to use the weekly planner to establish better eating habits, something that he managed to do with his support worker.

As Taylor spent more time with includem, it became clear that she did not have a stable tenancy. Taylor revealed to her worker that she had been spending time between her sibling's homes and on a friend's couch. This was making it difficult for her to adhere to the inflexible structure of her CPO conditions and her curfew. Includem supported Taylor to explain this situation at her bail

review meetings. South Lanarkshire social work and includem worked with Taylor to find a home so she could find stable footing to build a supportive structure around her life. Includem extended Taylor's referral length to make sure that tenancy and housing support could be provided until she found a home. Taylor told her includem workers about her ambition to enlist in the Army, and she explained how this ambition came from her desire to have more structure in her life. Includem assisted Taylor by creating a step-by-step plan and connecting her with various organisations to facilitate her journey. This structure enabled Taylor to access the resources needed to pursue her career in the Army.

For Katy, the introduction of structure was fundamental in helping her stabilise and organise various aspects of her life. Initially, Katy faced challenges with maintaining routines and meeting commitments due to frequent changes in her housing situation and a pattern of irregular events and activities. Includem provided structure by creating a supportive and consistent schedule, enabling her to better manage her appointments, finances, and social interactions. With her includem worker, Katy worked on practical goals, such as developing a CV, which helped her engage with opportunities like further education and employment. These tasks offered a framework designed to introduce a sense of responsibility and control over her future, reinforcing her capacity to maintain stability even when challenges arose.

Nicola's mental health challenges and history of emotional struggles made it difficult for her to establish stability in her life. This often resulting in behaviours that were cries for attention rather than acts of deliberate self-harm. Includem workers recognised early on that Nicola thrived best when her day-to-day life had clear, predictable routines. By introducing consistent, reliable structures, includem aimed to create a sense of safety and stability. Establishing a routine helped Nicola manage her mental health better and gave her a framework for working towards her goals, such as enrolling onto a college course and achieving a Dynamic Youth Award (DYA). However, due to the long-standing nature of her struggles, maintaining this structure was a constant challenge, especially when her mental health deteriorated. During these periods, the absence of routine further exacerbated her difficulties, leading to a loss of direction and purpose. Despite this, Nicola's response to includem's support demonstrated how beneficial structured support could be. When her life had a clear framework, she was more engaged, focused, and hopeful, revealing the vital role that structure played in helping her navigate her complex needs.

Employment

The SDS Pilot also found that each young person had a strong desire to pursue a career. Because of this, includem workers spent time focussing on employment and career development. Rowan's employment support, for example, began with practical steps like creating a CV and exploring job opportunities that matched his skills and interests. Includem's team helped him to identify the steps needed to prepare for the workforce and took him through the application process for college, where he could acquire new qualifications and open doors to future employment. This gradual approach, focusing on employability skills and educational opportunities, helped Rowan to establish a viable path to his career and increased his motivation to pursue long-term goals. Taylor used includem's employment support to take proactive steps toward securing a bar job while also working on applications for the Army. Her determination to enter the workforce

demonstrated a commitment to build a more independent and structured life, with includem providing guidance throughout the CV writing and job application processes.

Nicola volunteered with a youth group, and she expressed a desire to return to college to pursue a career in care. With support from her includem worker, Nicola regularly made time to work on her application for college. Through a structured routine and through her own desire to better herself, Nicola was accepted onto her chosen college course. Unfortunately, Nicola then experienced several mental health crises that resulted in her withdrawing from college and ending her volunteering position. The loss of structure compounded Nicola's mental health struggles because she lost a solid foundation to her life. Includem supported Nicola throughout these crises. When Nicola was in a more stable place, she asked includem to help with her DYA application and to find another volunteering role. Using support structures that worked well with Nicola when she applied for college, includem helped Nicola with her DYA application. Nicola received her DYA later that year.

Katy's employment journey began with a strong interest in finding work that matched her interests. Includem's team worked closely with Katy to build her employability skills, starting with creating a CV that highlighted her strengths and past experiences, such as her previous roles in retail. Katy also expressed an interest in training for a career in beauty therapy. Includem supported Katy by helping her to research college courses in beauty and advising her on the next steps that she needed to take. Additionally, as part of her drive to gain independence, includem helped Katy begin the process of applying for a provisional driving licence, which would not only support her employability but would also enhance her access to education and employment opportunities. Through this employment-focused support, includem enabled Katy to visualise a realistic and motivating career path that aligns with her interests and future aspirations.

Family

Family relationships played a significant role in the SDS Pilot, with each young person bringing unique challenges and dynamics into their support journey. For Rowan, family interaction was limited due to the conditions of his CPO, which restricted access to his family home. Rowan was allowed to see family members in the community, such as when he encountered his mother and father in local supermarkets and when he visited his uncle over the Christmas period. Includem workers provided emotional support to help Rowan manage the feelings of isolation and frustration that came with these restrictions, offering him a safe space to discuss his emotions. Rowan also worked with includem workers to develop strategies to cope with these limitations, such as planning to meet his family at his home. This approach helped Rowan maintain a sense of connection and resilience despite the constraints on his family relationships.

Taylor's family situation was similarly complicated, as she was estranged from her mother and stepfather, and her father had passed away. She did, however, maintain a close relationship with her two brothers, who provided her with housing support and emotional support. The includem team encouraged Taylor to lean on these positive relationships while managing the impact of the estrangement from her other family members. Taylor spoke with includem about the complexities of estrangement and how it impacted her wellbeing. This support contributed to helping Taylor recognise the value of maintaining connections with those she trusted even when larger family dynamics were strained. Nicola's family circumstances involved an active

relationship with her mother, who served as a crucial part of her support system. Her mother's involvement extended to regular communication with support services. Includem recognised the positive impact of this relationship and worked collaboratively with Nicola's mother, reinforcing the family bond and enabling a consistent support network that complemented the SDS conditions.

For Katy, family relationships were particularly challenging and often contributed to her emotional struggles. Her relationship with her family was strained. She frequently mentioned feelings of isolation and uncertainty about spending Christmas with her family. Includem's team offered Katy a safe space to explore and express these feelings, providing guidance on managing her expectations and emotions. Katy faced challenges in her relationship with her mother, especially following tensions around her living situation and personal belongings. Includem supported Katy by facilitating conversations that allowed her to express her concerns while encouraging her to rebuild trust within her family. Additionally, as her pregnancy raised new feelings and uncertainties, includem workers made sure that she had a steady source of support that prioritised her emotional well-being. This consistent emotional support helped Katy to process her complex family dynamics while contributing to her own sense of self-reliance and resilience.

Relationships

Relationships were a particularly sensitive area for Rowan due to the restrictions of his CPO, which limited his opportunities to interact with his family. He had also drifted apart from his high school friends which deepened his sense of isolation. Rowan did have some online friends that he made through gaming. However, these friends were mostly in America, and since the police were regularly inspecting his communications, Rowan avoided contacting them to respect their privacy and to avoid answering any leading questions from the police. The includem team recognised the value of positive social interactions for Rowan's personal development and connected him with local art groups as a way to meet new people and express himself creatively. These connections offered him a constructive outlet and opportunities to build new friendships in a supportive environment. Rowan also expressed his appreciation for the time includem workers spent talking to him, contrasting it with other services he had experienced where he felt interactions were merely a "tick box exercise." includem prioritised meaningful conversations and consistent emotional support, helping him feel valued and understood. This approach contributed to an overall improvement in Rowan's Wellbeing Web scores.

Taylor faced different challenges, as she struggled with distancing herself from negative peer influences. Her social circle had previously involved individuals who did not respect her personal boundaries, which affected her self-esteem. The includem team provided her with guidance on building healthier relationships and helped her to recognise the importance of surrounding herself with supportive and respectful individuals. Through these conversations, Taylor began to consider alternative social circles. This enabled her to start moving away from negative influences and toward a more constructive social environment. For example, Taylor turned to a friend who helped her to get a job in a bar.

Nicola struggled to build relationships with includem workers and other professionals. The trust and consistency she developed with includem staff helped her to gain a sense of stability, but

progress was slow. This trusting environment allowed Nicola to model positive social behaviour and reinforced her understanding of what supportive, healthy relationships looked like. However, the complexity of Nicola's life often prevented her from applying these lessons consistently. She would often travel into Glasgow city centre and interact with a negative peer group. Nicola would not reveal to her support workers what she had been doing, but she often returned with physical injuries such as broken ribs. Outside of these negative peer groups Nicola showed clear signs of improvement with regards to her understanding of what a healthy relationship would look like. For example, Nicola volunteered at a local youth club, which allowed her to give back to her community while developing a range of interpersonal and practical skills. By volunteering, Nicola not only built a sense of responsibility but also experienced the value of contributing to a positive cause. Nicola's relationship difficulties were complex and long standing and required support for a longer period than the ADAPT Project could provide. That being said, Nicola responded well to the support offered on the SDS Pilot even if progress was slow.

Katy's relationships were shaped by a mix of family tension, unstable friendships, and a reliance on a few close companions for support. She also faced challenges within her community due to these complicated social dynamics. While she had friends who were there for her, some of her peer relationships had a detrimental impact, leading to risky behaviours like heavy drinking and making it harder for her to maintain a stable living situation. For example, Katy lost her flat after several noise complaints were lodged against her. She often spoke to her includem workers about her trust issues and the effect of negative peer pressures. Includem provided her with ongoing support, encouraging her to reflect on the qualities of healthy and supportive friendships. These discussions gave Katy the confidence to evaluate her relationships more critically, helping her to recognise when friends were pushing her to make decisions that went against her goals, such as her goal of reducing her alcohol intake. Katy's links to community services, including her housing officer and addiction support workers, were also crucial in providing her with stability. Despite these resources, Katy still struggled with conflicting influences in her life. Includem played a vital role in helping Katy navigate these challenges, but the 12-week referral was not long enough to fully resolve her complex issues.

Goal Setting

For Rowan, goal setting was a valuable tool that helped him stay focused on practical, achievable steps. With the support of the includem staff, Rowan was able to reflect on his aspirations, particularly in areas like education and employment, and identify goals that felt realistic and motivating. He also decided to challenge himself by learning new recipes to improve his diet. Includem helped Rowan to break these broader goals down into smaller, more manageable tasks which made them more attainable. While Rowan's journey was gradual, each step helped him to keep moving forward toward his long-term goals.

Taylor demonstrated a strong drive towards goal setting, often expressing clear objectives and determination to pursue them. However, she struggled with achieving these goals, which led her to become frustrated. Recognising this, includem supported Taylor to move from planning to execution, offering both practical advice and motivation to sustain her progress. Through ongoing discussions, includem helped Taylor to refine her approach, breaking her goals down further and celebrating small wins along the way. An example of this is Taylor's drive to join the Army. Using

the Education, Training & Employment module from includem's ABL toolkit, Taylor was able to break down the steps required to achieve her goal. Beginning with a visit to the recruitment office, she then spoke with the recruiter, wrote a CV, filled in the application form, and then submitted the form. Taylor used the steps that she created to achieve her goals.

Nicola's goals were closely connected to her career. Together with includem staff, she engaged in meaningful conversations about her long-term vision, exploring potential career paths. Includem worked with Nicola to identify relevant steps, such as attending college, which would enable her to gain the qualifications needed to pursue her chosen career path. This approach not only clarified her ambitions but also equipped her with a realistic, step-by-step plan for achieving them, giving her a sense of direction and purpose. After Nicola recovered from her mental health crises, she regained the habit of goal setting in her pursuit of a DYA.

For Katy, goal setting was crucial for navigating her future and regaining stability. With support from includem, she outlined practical goals that aligned with her immediate needs and long-term aspirations. One of Katy's initial goals was to establish a healthier daily routine, which includem helped her break down into manageable actions. These included setting regular sleep schedules and regular mealtimes. This structure offered Katy a stronger sense of control over her daily life and improved her overall well-being. As her confidence grew, Katy began setting larger goals, including finding part-time work to support her finances and exploring further education. Includem's staff helped her create a step-by-step plan for these ambitions, starting with improving her CV and preparing for job interviews. This process gave Katy both a clear pathway and the encouragement to work toward her goals.

Attitudes to Offending Behaviour

Includem worked with each young person to explore their past behaviour. Rowan initially struggled to recognise the harm caused by his offence and was somewhat resistant to acknowledging its consequences. From Rowan's perspective, the context surrounding his offence meant that he felt that what he did was an accident, and because what he did was an accident then he should not have been charged. However, through focused sessions using ABL modules, Rowan gradually developed a better understanding of the impact of his actions. While Rowan still thought of his offence as a result of an accident, he understood that the situation that caused the offence was in his control, and he is able to avoid taking such risks in the future. Includem's structured approach encouraged Rowan to think critically about his choices and the impact on others, helping him improve his consequential thinking. This gradual process enabled him to reflect on his behaviour and helped him to recognise the harm caused by his offence and how to avoid any further offending behaviour.

Taylor had a different relationship with offending, as she recognised the harm that her behaviour had caused but found it challenging to separate herself from peers who negatively influenced her actions. Her self-awareness regarding the consequences of her behaviour was evident, yet she struggled with the social pressures that came from her established relationships. Includem's role in Taylor's journey involved helping her to identify these negative influences and offering strategies to distance herself from them. By engaging Taylor in conversations about peer pressure and the long-term implications of her actions, includem helped her to clarify her values and development a mindset geared towards making positive choices.

Nicola's offending behaviour was tied to personal struggles and mental health challenges. Social work records showed that her actions primarily harmed herself, prompting includem to focus on supporting positive self-care. Although Nicola often claimed not to care about the consequences of her actions, her attempts to safeguard herself and plan for the future suggested otherwise. An analysis of her offending and behavioural patterns indicated that her actions were not criminal in intent but were a way of seeking attention, particularly from the police. Social Work advised that this behaviour is linked to Nicola's diagnosed personality disorder and reflects an unmet emotional need. Her family, health professionals, and police have all observed this attention-seeking behaviour, though there is no evidence that she posed a risk to others. Includem's support centred on improving her emotional well-being and fostering positive relationships. Given the serious self-harm and suicidal risks, she continues to receive specialised support from a Psychiatrist and Psychologist to stabilise her mental health.

Katy's attitude towards her past behaviour showed a notable evolution throughout her time with includem. She recognised that impulsivity had played a role in her previous offending and was motivated to make lasting changes. Through consistent support, includem helped Katy reflect on her actions and work on strategies to avoid reoffending. For example, includem supported her in using a weekly planner to better manage her time, helping her to structure her day and make more positive choices. This practical tool, along with ongoing discussions about her goals and values, allowed Katy to gain clarity and build resilience. As she developed new skills and a clearer sense of direction, Katy grew more determined to leave behind negative patterns and focus on a more positive, structured future.

No contact or limited contact with includem

Taylor's initial engagement with includem was sporadic and inconsistent. However, through the application includem's ethos of "stickability," engagement gradually improved. This approach involved the team maintaining consistent efforts to connect with Taylor, reinforcing the importance of resilience in building relationships. Over time, Taylor began to appreciate the support offered, indicating that perseverance and patience on the part of includem staff can be crucial in breaking down barriers to engagement.

Nicola also exhibited periods of low engagement. Her fluctuating involvement in the SDS Pilot highlighted the need for adaptable approaches when working with young people who struggle with commitment or who go through periods of personal instability. Includem recognised this and adapted the support to accommodate her changing levels of engagement. This included focussed efforts to re-establish a connection with Nicola when she was in crisis, and prioritising plans to maintain a consistent presence when Nicola was available.

Katy's relationship with includem was marked by several instances of missed appointments and difficulty in reaching her. Despite these challenges, the includem team exhibited persistence in their efforts to reconnect with her. They employed various strategies, including home visits, text messages, and phone calls, demonstrating their commitment to ensuring Katy received the support she needed. Katy expressed appreciation for these efforts, explaining that includem "try their hardest to see me, if I don't answer the phone they come and chap my door."

Includem's efforts to engage with Charlotte and Nick are examples of the various challenges that can arise when providing support to young people with complex needs. Despite several weeks of consistent attempts to engage these young people, meaningful contact was not established. This lack of engagement may stem from being overwhelmed or disconnected from support networks, which can lead to young people struggling to see the value in the services offered. Additionally, young people may have been let down by support services in the past, making it challenging for support workers to establish trust and rapport. These factors can create obstacles that can complicate the process of delivering meaningful support to young people in need.

Craig and Julia were referred to includem in error. Neither young person was deemed suitable by their social worker, and the referral was made when their social worker was on annual leave. They remain part of this evaluation because includem staff spent around six weeks trying to engage each of them before the error was picked up by South Lanarkshire social work. These cases highlight the necessity for clear communication and for all stakeholders to be clear on the referral process. This will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

Includem's Internal Processes

Research

The initial research phase of the ADAPT Project focused on understanding the challenges within Youth Justice services across Scotland. The goal of the project was to engage with representatives from all 32 local authorities, initially targeting statutory social work and Police Scotland. Research conversations held over Microsoft Teams gathered both quantitative and qualitative data through a structured question template. Thematic analysis was used to identify emerging national issues. It was through this process that the gaps were identified in the South Lanarkshire SDS service.

Includem interviewed three organisations from South Lanarkshire. Analysis of the interview data revealed seven distinct themes and 16 individual issues relating to service provisions for young people in conflict with the law. A theme that emerged for all three organisations was "Demand/Resource Mismatch". This theme refers to situations where the demand for certain services or support exceeds the available resources. The findings in South Lanarkshire reflect a national trend in Scotland where includem's thematic analysis showed that 89.4% of all organisations face issues relating to a demand/resource mismatch. Specific issues relating to organisations in South Lanarkshire included a lack of out of hours support, services being over subscribed, and an increase in referrals for high-teir offending behaviour.

Two other themes that emerged across South Lanarkshire are "Falling Through Gaps in Services" and "Lack of skilled/appropriate court support." The Falling Through Gaps in Services theme highlights cases where young people fail to receive the support they need due to gaps in the existing service provision. Where the Demand/Resource Mismatch theme refers to the resourcing of current provisions, Falling Through Gaps in Services

refers to the need for new provisions and services. This includes the need for support services for young people transitioning between primary school and secondary school, and young people transitioning between youth services and adult services. The Lack of Skilled/Appropriate Court Support theme highlights the need for more trained professionals who can provide appropriate support for young people who are navigating the court system. This theme includes young people who have already been arrested and are going to court or are in the court system.

The research interview findings were presented to the ADAPT Project steering group, which is made up of heads of service, the project leader, research associate, and members of the executive team. It was agreed that there were clear gaps in services for South Lanarkshire social work. Recognising the urgency and potential impact of addressing these gaps, a steering group member reached out directly to South Lanarkshire social work to initiate discussions on possible solutions. It was during this conversation that the SDS Pilot was proposed. The idea was then brought back to the steering group, where it was reviewed and approved. The green light from the steering group marked the formal beginning of the SDS Pilot.

Design

The design of the SDS Pilot was very limited. Includem have over 20 years' experience providing intensive support for young people in conflict with the law. Includem also have a well-established and strong relationship with South Lanarkshire social work that goes back many years. The necessity for a careful and deliberate service design process was overlooked because it was taken for granted that previous experience and strong relationships alone were enough to provide adequate support for young people in conflict with the law.

The service design process for the SDS Pilot did not follow a well-established framework, such as the double-diamond approach, and instead pulled together elements of previous services that proved to be highly effective. While these elements were very successful in the context of the service they were originally implemented, they lacked the same level of impact outside of that framework. For example, the use of a 12-week referral period proved to be very successful in previous services that includem provided. However, a 12-week referral was too short for the SDS Pilot. During her exit interview, Nicola told includem that support "would have been better if this could go on for longer." If a robust design process was taken from the beginning, it might have come to light much earlier that a longer referral period would have been more appropriate for this service. Another example is the appropriateness of includem's principle of "stickability." While this principle has worked in the past and was clearly very successful for a number of young people on the SDS Pilot, delivery staff from includem who were interviewed after the pilot ended expressed concerns that some young people seemed too anxious to say no to the service. There was a feeling that some young people would have preferred to be supported in other ways but felt pressure to accept support due to the persistence of the staff.

The lack of inclusion of the delivery staff and Service Managers in the design process also hindered the project. The design of the SDS Pilot was a very top-down process that did not include input from any of the delivery staff or the Service Managers. The insights and experiences of staff

members working directly with children and young people are invaluable. The nuances and details that are observed by the delivery staff are essential for any service design. Delivery staff and Service Managers are also able to ask questions that might not be considered by staff on an upper management level. These kinds of questions need to be answered when using the double-diamond process, which would have highlighted potential gaps in perspective before the service went live.

Referral documentation between South Lanarkshire and includem was very detailed, which ensured a clear understanding of each young person's specific needs. This enabled includem staff to act quickly to provide person-centred support to each young person. Comprehensive safeguarding information was also included, allowing staff to be well-prepared to manage any potential risks and to prioritise the safety of all involved. This high standard of documentation also strengthened trust and collaboration between organisations. Where the referral process did suffer was on the clarity of the referral criteria. Two young people were referred to includem in error, which then begs the question about how many young people might have been missed through the screening process. Establishing a clearer referral process that matched the rigour and detail of the referral documentation would have helped to prevent misdirected referrals and ensure that all eligible young people were appropriately identified.

Another area that was overlooked in the design process was the need to produce information leaflets for young people being offered support by includem. Details of who includem are and what to expect from the SDS Pilot were given verbally, which does not allow for consistency between young people. While each young person will have specific needs with regards to communication, having a standard leaflet would have provided both a consistent baseline for information between young people and something that they could take away with them for further consideration.

Internal Communication

In a similar way that the design process was very top-down, the communication process on the SDS Pilot was two tiered. Communication between members of the steering group was consistent and timely. Through weekly meetings and group emails, all members of the steering group were kept up to date on the progress of the SDS Pilot. However, the delivery staff and Service Managers were kept in the dark about the design and implementation of the SDS Pilot until less than a week prior to the service began. This did not give the delivery team enough time to fully prepare and get up to speed on the details of the pilot. It also did not allow time for each member of staff to fully understand the SDS process in South Lanarkshire and what restrictions each young person might face.

Similarly, the delivery team and Service Managers were not given regular updates on the progress of the pilot. The delivery team met once a week to discuss the young people that were being supported. At these meetings, delivery staff were fully supported in their work and communication with Service Managers was consistent and very open. However, in terms of the SDS Pilot as a whole, there was a clear break in communications between the Steering Group and the delivery team. For example, the temporary nature of the SDS Pilot

was communicated, but the exact deadline was not. This meant that delivery staff were only informed of the pilot deadline a couple of months before it arrived.

Recommendations/Learning

Based on the findings from the SDS Pilot, there are several recommendations for future pilots and the ADAPT project as a whole.

SDS Support Service Structure

The 12-week referral period, while effective in other contexts, was too short for the SDS Pilot. Some young people were facing issues that took longer than 12 weeks to resolve, while for others it did not allow enough time for meaningful relationships to fully develop. Extending the referral period to at least six months would provide a more realistic timeframe for providing support, particularly for young people with complex needs. Specific training for delivery staff working with young people up to the age of 25 would improve the effectiveness of the service. The age range of young people on the SDS Pilot was between 16 and 25. The support needs in this age group are very different, with the older age group having support needs that might sit outwith the standard training package of a children's charity. Staff feedback highlighted the need for a tailored approach when working with older young people, whose communication styles and social needs differ from those of younger individuals. Training should include how to build relationships with this demographic, how to address the specific challenges they face, and what other support they might need to fully engage with the justice system.

Referral process

Improving the clarity of the referral criteria is also recommended. The referral documentation provided highly detailed information about each young person's needs, establishing trust within the includem team. However, to prevent future cases of erroneous referrals and potentially missed young people, a robust referral process with more explicit criteria is essential. This process could incorporate an initial screening checklist or a formalised review protocol, ensuring that only the young people who fit the criteria are referred to includem. Enhancing clarity around the referral criteria will help maximise resources and ensure that support is directed towards those most in need.

Design

A structured service design framework, such as the double-diamond approach, should be used for all pilots. The SDS Pilot revealed that assumptions based on past experience and relationships might not fully meet the needs of each new pilot. Establishing a systematic design process would allow for a thorough analysis of service demands, which could flag up potential needs, such as longer referral periods and tweaks to includem's model of practice. Integrating delivery staff and Service Managers in the design phase is critical to ensure that their insights inform decisions

from the outset. This would enhance the relevance of the services and avoid last-minute adjustments that might impact service quality.

Encouragingly, these improvements have already begun to take shape within the ADAPT Project. During the SDS Pilot, all staff on the ADAPT project received training on the double diamond approach through The Promise Design School. This equipped the whole team with a structured, consistent method for understanding and solving service design challenges. Additionally, a scoping log was introduced to systematically capture all discussions, ideas, and meeting notes. The scoping log ensured that a comprehensive record enables informed decision-making as the project evolves. Delivery staff are also actively consulted on new pilot designs, establishing a more inclusive and responsive planning process. This approach has not only enhanced staff engagement but has also led to early adaptations in service delivery, demonstrating the value of continuous improvement and reflective practice in meeting the needs of young people.

Communication

A more consistent and comprehensive communication structure is essential. While the steering group maintained good communication among themselves, the delivery staff and Service Managers experienced significant delays in receiving essential information. Weekly updates from the steering group to all levels of the organisation could bridge this gap, ensuring that everyone involved has a shared understanding of any developments. This transparency would enable delivery staff to prepare adequately and adapt to changes, ultimately enhancing service delivery for young people. Regular updates should also include specific details about project timelines to avoid uncertainty around project deadlines and ensure smooth transitions between different stages of the project.

Again, before the SDS pilot concluded, the ADAPT Project had already started to improve communications. Weekly meetings between the project lead and delivery staff have been introduced, creating a consistent platform for sharing updates, discussing challenges, and refining approaches in real time. Additionally, the Research Associate for the project regularly consults with delivery staff to ensure that their insights and concerns are directly fed back to the steering group. To further improve communication, the aforementioned scoping log has been made available to all members of the ADAPT Project team. This enables them to easily track project updates and developments on their own schedules rather than waiting for the next formal meeting. These changes create a more inclusive and responsive communication structure. This not only enables the delivery team to stay informed but has improved the design process of new pilots in the ADAPT Project.

Conclusion

In many respects, the SDS Pilot achieved its core objectives. The ADAPT Project identified a clear gap in South Lanarkshire's youth justice provisions, and then demonstrated that an intensive, person-centred support service can fill this gap. One of the core strengths of the SDS Pilot was the principle of stickability. Stickability is exemplified in the way includem staff persistently maintained contact with young people. Despite the challenges of missed appointments and fluctuating motivation, includem staff used various strategies, such as home visits, phone calls, and sending text messages, to ensure that young people received continuous support. For example, despite her intermittent participation, Taylor's story is an example how a patient and resilient approach from includem helped her to gain stability and eventually progress toward her career goal of joining the Army.

The emphasis on building relationships was another critical element of the SDS Pilot. By fostering trust and rapport with the young people, includem staff were able to create a safe space where young people felt comfortable sharing their struggles and working through their challenges. This was particularly important for young people like Rowan whose sense of isolation was alleviated by being connected with local art groups and with includem staff themselves. The relationship-based model allowed includem workers to understand the unique needs of each participant and offer bespoke support. For instance, Katy's relationship with her includem workers helped her address the complexities in her life, such as family tensions, negative peer influences, and issues related to alcohol use. The consistent and trusting relationships she built with the includem team gave her the confidence to open up about her challenges and explore constructive solutions.

A further strength of the SDS Pilot was the use of appropriate ABL modules. This provided young people with a structured and practical pathway for achieving their personal goals. The ABL toolkit helped young people like Rowan to break down his larger ambitions into achievable steps, such as improving his diet through cooking and developing a CV to enhance his career prospects. Taylor used the ABL toolkit to translate aspirations to join the Army into tangible steps, such as attending the recruitment office and refining her CV. The ABL toolkit provided each young person with the tools and confidence to move from goal setting to goal achievement.

Despite these achievements, the SDS Pilot also highlighted important lessons that have implications for future service development. One of the main lessons was the need for a more robust and inclusive service design process. Overlooking the necessity of a formal service design framework, such as the double-diamond, limited the pilot's effectiveness in several key areas. For instance, the use of a 12-week referral period, while successful in previous projects, proved insufficient for the needs of young people on the SDS Pilot. Some young people required more time to build trust and make meaningful progress, particularly those with complex, ongoing issues such as Nicola, who struggled with fluctuating mental health challenges. A longer referral period could have allowed for a more gradual trust-building process, giving staff the time needed to establish stronger connections. Delivery staff work directly with young people, and their observations and insights could have anticipated potential shortcomings before they arose. A collaborative design process could identify the need for more flexible timelines and the potential to tailor interventions more precisely to each young person's circumstances.

Communication emerged as another critical area for improvement. While the steering group maintained effective and regular communication, this level of transparency did not extend to the delivery staff and Service Managers. For instance, staff who were responsible for engaging young people were not kept informed about the broader timeline of the pilot. The lack of updates created uncertainty and made it difficult for delivery staff to plan their work and manage expectations. The absence of a consistent communication framework also impacted the staff's ability to adapt quickly to changes, as seen when the delivery team was informed about the project deadline only a couple of months before it ended. If regular updates and clear channels for feedback had been established from the beginning, this breakdown in communication could have been avoided.

With this in mind, it is worth reiterating how the SDS Pilot could be improved. Extending the referral period to six months would be a key change. This would allow staff more time to build meaningful relationships and address long-standing and complex issues. Providing tailored training for delivery staff working with young people aged 16 to 25 would also enhance the service's effectiveness. Older young people often present with needs that differ significantly from those of younger adolescents. Including training on age-specific challenges faced by older young people in the justice system would equip staff with the tools necessary to engage this demographic more effectively. Furthermore, refining the referral process by implementing a more robust screening checklist would reduce the likelihood of inappropriate referrals and ensure that resources are allocated to those who can benefit most from the service. For instance, the erroneous referrals of Craig and Julia highlight the need for a clearer referral framework.

Incorporating a collaborative design process from the outset, involving delivery staff and Service Managers in key decisions, would further strengthen the service. For example, involving delivery staff in the design phase could help to identify practical considerations early on. In terms of communication, future SDS support services would benefit from a transparent and inclusive strategy that keeps all stakeholders informed and engaged. Regular updates from the steering group, shared across the entire team, would ensure that everyone has a shared understanding of project developments and timelines. For instance, weekly bulletins or updates could provide critical information, enabling delivery staff to adapt their approaches in real time and maintain a consistent level of support for young people. Making project logs accessible to all staff members would further enhance this transparency and allow for continuous, informed adjustments to be made based on staff feedback and observations.

The SDS Pilot has laid a strong foundation for the future development of youth justice services, providing insights into what works well and where improvements are needed. By integrating these learnings into a more structured design process, extending referral lengths, enhancing staff training, refining referral criteria, and improving communication, includem is well-positioned to develop a more effective, responsive, and inclusive support service. The changes already being implemented through the ADAPT Project demonstrate a commitment to continuous improvement, reflective practice, and a collaborative approach that will better meet the needs of young people in conflict with the law. With these adjustments, includem can continue to build on its successes, making a lasting, positive impact on the lives of young people and their communities.

