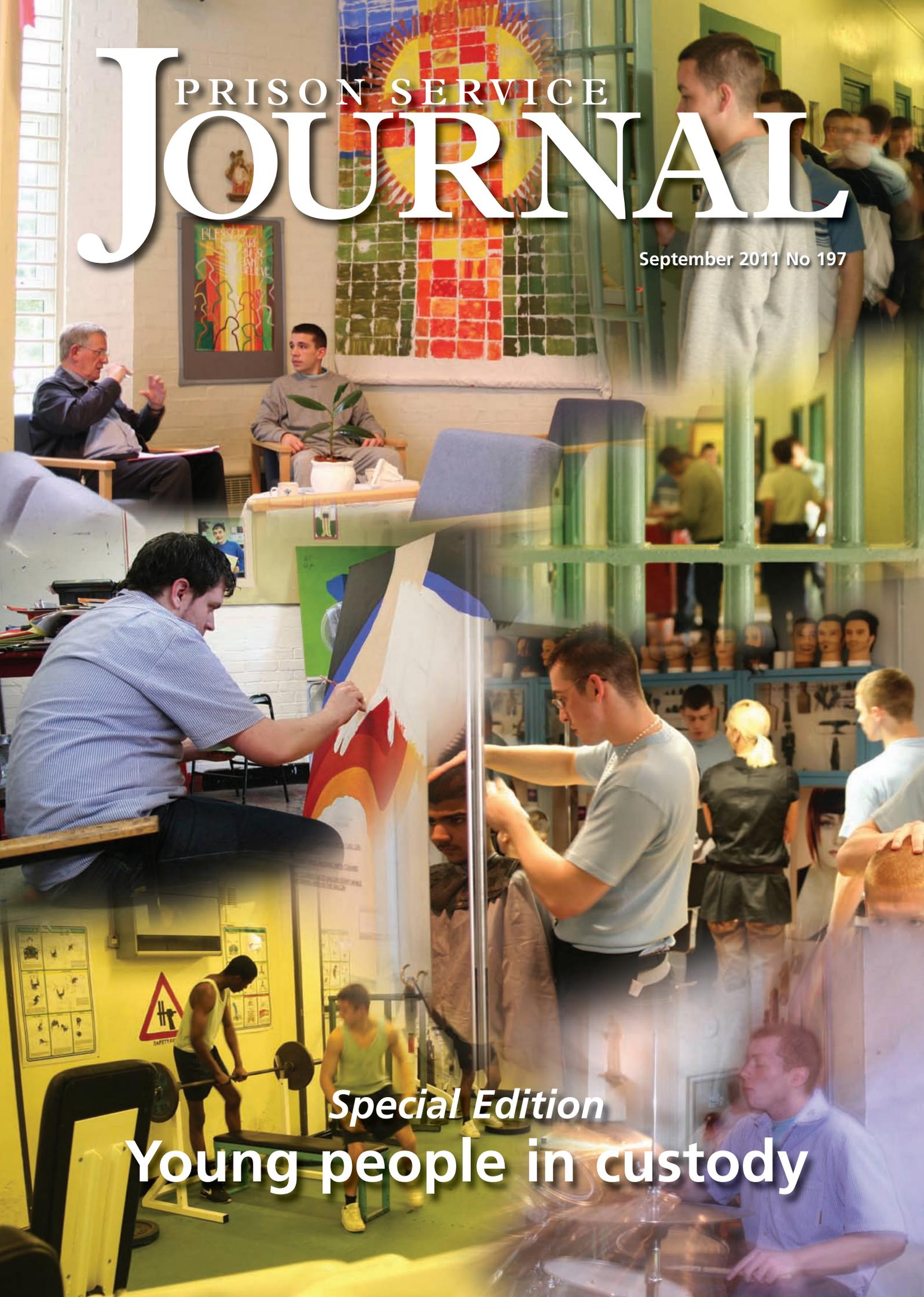


PRISON SERVICE JOURNAL

September 2011 No 197



Special Edition
Young people in custody

Reviews

Book Review

Effective Practice in Youth Justice

(second edition)

By Stephenson, M., Giller, H. and Brown, S.

Publisher: Oxon, Routledge (2011)

Price: £22.99

This book has undergone significant revisions since its first edition in 2007, although its primary focus remains as the key text for those undertaking youth justice courses with the Open University. The authors have responded to policy changes that have taken place since the first edition, as well as to the comments of reviewers of the first edition, and to reviews of evidence undertaken by the Youth Justice Board. Acknowledgement should be made at the outset that the timing of the new edition, and to a large extent its content, are dictated by the learning outcomes of the course for which it was produced. The focus of the text is on 'the relationship between research evidence and practice and key skills such as critical reflection and acquiring and using the information needed for effective practice in youth justice' (p. xvi). This is a tall order and, whilst the authors have produced a text that summarises and discusses a wide range of research evidence in a format that is useful and informative for practitioners, within a framework that attempts a degree of ongoing critical debate regarding the context and nature of the evidence base, some aspects of the text are more successful than others.

The introductory chapter of the book is a particular strength of the text and is entitled 'Evidence-based practice and effective practice' and provides a succinct and helpful overview of the rise of the centrality of evidence within the criminal justice system in general, and the youth justice system in particular. Its strength lies in its accessibility for practitioners; for example, with the summaries of pertinent issues which are brought together to explain the rise in adoption of evidence-based practice (such as the risk society and managerialism), but then to move onto the ways in which these ideas (for example, the principles of effective practice) may then be employed by practitioners in order to add to their 'evidential storehouse' (p. 37). A newcomer to the rise of evidence-based practice and the centrality of the health-based approach to evaluation (such as the randomised controlled trial) will find this chapter invaluable in understanding how and why 'evidence' has become so central to the youth justice field. The chapter then provides a summary of the principles of effective practice drawn from McGuire and Priestley¹ and Lipsey². These are identified as: risk classification, criminogenic need, dosage, responsivity, community based, intervention modality and programme integrity. The remaining chapters are topic-based and each addresses these principles in turn as a framework for discussing the available evidence, as it relates to each topic

covered. Some of the chapters in the first edition have been removed (such as targeted neighbourhood intervention, mentoring and ISSP), a new chapter has been added (engagement) and others reworked. The principles of effective practice themselves are said to offer 'a framework within which projects can be developed and evaluated, or guidelines when constructing a package of interventions' (p. 25). Discussion of these principles provides a structure for each of the following chapters, which is a helpful device for those attempting to make sense of the evidence base, but at times it seems to constrain the discussion.

One of the key criticisms of the first edition of this book was that it failed to discuss the centrality of engaging with young people as underpinning all the work that takes place with them in order to reduce offending. This is now addressed in some detail in a new chapter entitled 'Engaging young people' which is a brave attempt to review the state of knowledge about engagement. What emerges is the acknowledgement that the research regarding engagement is very limited and that there are significant issues with defining it. This issue brings to the fore an ongoing difficulty with this and the remaining chapters, which is that the text does not convey the reality of the very messy business of adults and young people colliding in an involuntary relationship in which one (the adult) is supposed to bring about change in the

1. McGuire, J. and Priestley, P. (1995) 'Reviewing What Works: Past, Present and Future', in J. McGuire (ed.). *What Works: Reducing Reoffending (Guidelines from Research and Practice)*. Chichester: J. Wiley and Sons.

2. Lipsey, M. (1995), 'What Do we Learn from 400 Research Studies on the Effectiveness of Treatment with Juvenile Delinquents?' in J. McGuire (ed.) *What Works: Reducing Reoffending: Guidelines from Research and Practice*. Chichester: J. Wiley and Sons.

young person. Given the importance of this topic to everything that is discussed thereafter, it is unclear why this chapter does not appear immediately after the introductory chapter. It is also unclear, although this may well be a reflection of the research evidence itself, why there is so little attention paid to discussing gender and 'race', given the important structural context within which youth offending (and indeed, all offending) takes place.

As the authors state, they find themselves publishing at a particularly difficult point in time (at

the start of a new administration) in which the direction of future policy in youth justice can only really be guessed at. Despite this, they have made considerable efforts to strengthen the contextual element of this book, as well as the specific practice-based chapters and have succeeded, to some extent, in responding to their critics, most notably by including the chapter devoted to engaging young people. Their aims, however, remain difficult to achieve given the balancing act they are attempting and the extent of the ground that they are covering. On one hand,

they are attempting a critique of the notions underpinning effective practice (of which there are many), whilst having to engage with these notions as they apply to practice in specific areas of engagement with young people. This is no easy task, but as an introductory text, it should prove invaluable to practitioners within youth justice, whilst also being relevant to the wider criminal justice community of practitioners.

Louise Sturgeon-Adams is a Lecturer in Community Justice at the University of Hull.