



## Public legal education An evaluation

# the Howard League for Penal Reform

## Key points

- U R Boss is a participatory project aimed at improving processes and outcomes for young people in the criminal justice system.
- Resettlement was identified by young people as a major issue, both by the number of enquiries to the U R Boss legal helpline about resettlement issues and from the participation work done with young people by U R Boss participation officers
- Resettlement was seen as a suitable area for increasing public awareness and knowledge via public legal education (PLE) training and resources, due to significant lack of awareness among practitioners
- The young advisors had some involvement with the development of the materials for practitioners and participated in several training sessions
- Young people more widely played a key role in the development of new resources for use by young people
- PLE around issues of resettlement was found to have increased the awareness of practitioners, and some participants reported that it had led them to change their practice in ways they expect will improve outcomes for young people
- Listening to children was integral to the work and was integrated into the PLE resettlement strategy and approach.

The Howard League established U R Boss as a participatory programme of work aimed at improving processes and outcomes for young people in the criminal justice system. It is funded by the Big Lottery Young People's Fund 2 over the period July 2009 to June 2014.

The aim of this interim evaluation report is to review a particular aspect of the work of U R Boss – in this case the Public Legal Education (PLE) strand. PLE is generally understood to be a range of activities intended to create awareness and develop skills related to the law and the justice system. It is aimed at people who are not legal practitioners. Within U R Boss the PLE work relates to a number of the milestones in the Big Lottery funding application, including:

- *Develop a training manual and deliver training to local authorities, voluntary and statutory agencies*
- *Facilitate good practice seminars for professionals and organisations, including prison governors, Youth Offending Teams [YOTs], educationalists, professional associations, unions, etc.*
- *Provide training to lawyers working with children in the criminal justice system, through written materials and workshops*
- *Public education about how young people in the penal system can and should be encouraged to develop skills for life*
- *Working with corporate parents to ensure that support is appropriate, commensurate with need, and ongoing to ensure desistance from crime and anti-social behaviour*  
*(End of Year Report to Big Lottery July 2013)*

This report will explore the origins of the U R Boss PLE programme, its development, organisation and delivery, and its achievements, and will consider the role of the U R Boss young advisors and other young people in the work associated with this.

It is based on a range of data sources including: interviews with key members of staff and young advisors, evaluation forms completed at training events, follow up evaluation (survey and telephone interviews) with seminar attendees some 2–9 months later, participant observation of training events and a review of relevant documentation and written materials (Data sources: two seminars observed; Interviews with: three members of

the legal team, four U R Boss staff, one young advisor; 73 post-training evaluation forms from participants on the day; 17 surveys completed by seminar participants in Sept 2013 (emailed 73, twelve no longer available); six telephone interviews with seminar participants in June/July 2013; review of relevant written documents).

### **The origins of Public Legal Education: Resettlement law**

The legal team at the Howard League has been working with young people since 2002 and public legal education has always been at the heart of the work. Members of the legal team report they have always sought to ensure the young people they provide legal advice to understand the law and how it relates to them, and how they are using the law to develop rights and entitlements. They understand that if they do this, young people are, for example,

*much more able to hold their own in meetings, and see the legal pathway to their ultimate aim of supported safe accommodation.*  
*(Interview with member of legal team)*

Hence PLE as part of U R Boss was seen as a natural development of the way the legal team had been practicing for many years.

Resettlement is a term used to describe the transition from custody into the community and the support that will be in place for the person leaving custody. According to the U R Boss report to BIG Lottery (2013), resettlement is more than just providing housing; it is about ensuring that children and young people have a home, that their needs are met and that they have the best possible chance for a positive future.

The proposal to focus the PLE work of U R Boss on resettlement came from a number of places. While the work of the legal team covers many areas of law and a range of problems faced by children and young people, resettlement is consistently the main issue about which people contact the helpline (free legal advice line for children and young people in custody).

*In year four we have 71 cases on resettlement forming over 23 per cent of our legal work.*  
*(End of Year Report to Big Lottery July 2013)*

Resettlement was identified as important by young people themselves in the participation work undertaken early in the project that resulted in the *Life Outside* report and videos.

To address the need for more information to be available about resettlement, the decision



was made to create an accessible resource for non-legal practitioners, with accompanying training. The aim was to equip a range of practitioners with knowledge of how to use the law appropriately to work to promote improved prospects for resettlement. Another important element of this work was for young people to produce resources for young people themselves.

### **Organisation and delivery of the PLE**

Developing public legal education focusing on resettlement has brought different elements of the Howard League to work together. It has involved considerable input from members of the legal team, the U R Boss senior campaigns co-ordinator, the participation workers, the training and development officer and, in some aspects, young people themselves. It was jointly overseen by the legal director and the director of campaigns. Three components were developed to support the PLE: a guide for practitioners on resettlement law; a training package to accompany the guide; and information leaflets on aspects of resettlement for young people.

### **Development of the guide and training seminars**

The legal team used their knowledge of the law, their individual casework with young people and also queries received from practitioners to inform the content.

*There is a page on ROTL [Release on temporary licence] for instance – it is only through years and years of practice we know about people coming out and failing because they just found it too weird. None of the other materials you will find on resettlement mention young people being released on licence. (Interview with member of legal team)*

All those involved agreed it had been a time consuming piece of work. Many decisions had to be made along the way to focus the content, for example that it would be for under 18-year-olds only as the law relating to adults is very different. The legal team took great pains to ensure the accuracy and accessibility of the information in the guide, titled *Resettlement – the legal rights of children and young people in the criminal justice system in need of accommodation and support*.

Once the guide was completed training materials to support learning about children and young people's rights were developed and piloted with several different groups of professionals. Each time

both the guide and the training were amended in response to the feedback. The final version of the guide was placed on the Howard League website. Between 12 November 2012 and 29 November 2013, 283 copies had been downloaded by, among others, YOT staff, voluntary sector workers, housing staff, legal professionals, YOI (young offender institution) resettlement leads, governors and academics. A further 366 copies have been distributed via training seminars and events.

The guide and training were promoted via a wide range of platforms and events, including the Howard League and U R Boss websites, e-bulletins, Twitter, the Youth Justice Board annual convention, CLINKS Light Lunch newsletter, Nottinghamshire Law Society, KCH Garden Square Chambers, Howard League Lawyer's Network meetings and *Children & Young People Now* and *The Justice Gap* features.

### **The resettlement training seminars**

The one day resettlement law training was aimed at practitioners working with young people affected by the criminal justice system. The objectives of the training were for participants to gain knowledge of the principles and mechanisms underlying the provision of resettlement support to young people leaving custody; and to acquire knowledge of the legislation and guidance that underpins the provision of resettlement support, enabling them to assist young people with resettlement needs upon release. This training was not designed to train practitioners so that they could legally advise or represent young people in need of resettlement advice. Resettlement law is complex and so practitioners were specifically advised on when and how they should refer young people on for legal assistance.

As of September 2013<sup>1</sup>, seven geographically-based courses had been run, as well as three bespoke sessions for specific organisations including two at a YOI. In total 212 people have attended, including YOT and YOS workers (court officer, advocate, social worker, key worker, managers etc.), NGO resettlement workers, solicitors, homelessness caseworkers from local authorities and NGOs, and a magistrate. All participants were given a hard copy of the guide. In the main take-up was good, though one planned course for practitioners did not run due to lack of participants. The training sessions were delivered by a member of the legal team and the U R Boss training and development officer.

## Young people's leaflets

It had always been the intention to produce information for young people as well, but it quickly became apparent that a full young people's version of the guide was not feasible as it was too complex. To gain information about which issues were most important to young people and what leaflets they would find useful, U R Boss staff (the training and development officer and youth participation officer) ran a number of participation groups within a YOI with young people who chose to come to the sessions.

As a result of this two leaflets for young people were produced: *What is MAPPA?* and *Moving On*. Four thousand five hundred copies of *What is MAPPA?* have been distributed directly by NOMS. Both the *Moving On* and *What is MAPPA?* leaflets were launched at the Youth Justice Board conference in November 2013, and 800 (estimate) of each were distributed there. A further 750 *What is MAPPA?* and 560 *Moving On* leaflets have been ordered by YOTs, YOIs and voluntary sector agencies.

## Young people's involvement

Young people in custody were very involved in the development of the PLE materials for young people. A short report of the work with young people in custody was produced by the U R Boss team, and it records that young people were enthusiastic about their involvement and showed this in a number of ways – for example through consistent voluntary attendance, their level of engagement, and wishing to ensure they can continue to attend, 'Can you make sure I do come [to] this session'. Two sets of four sessions took place, involving thirteen young people in total, but inevitably numbers dwindled as the young people's circumstances changed (for example when they were moved to another prison or released from prison). The sessions used a range of interactive techniques to facilitate young people's contributions.

The *What is MAPPA?* leaflet was reported to be particularly young-person led: Young people initiated the idea for the leaflet which is based on an issue young people had identified, and the headings in the leaflet are based on key questions identified by young people themselves. Young people also commented on the text and were involved in the design, layout, drafting and revision of content. Some young people stayed involved after the sessions finished, writing to U R Boss staff with ideas and submitting drawings for the leaflets.

The work needed to organise the groups in custody and the great care taken to ensure legal accuracy, while at the same time creating leaflets that young people would want to read and be able to understand was very time-consuming, but essential to produce quality leaflets fit for purpose.

*It is good to have had the young people involved like this as, as we have their ideas and a feel for what they really needed. Because half the battle is getting the young person to pick up a leaflet, let alone the right leaflet.*  
(Howard League staff member)

With regard to the practitioner guide and training, young people had little involvement directly, although all the case examples utilised in the materials are from the lived experiences of young people. The cover of the guide was designed by a young person and one of the young advisors wrote the foreword.

The young advisors were able to attend the resettlement training and learn about their rights and how to support other young people to obtain their rights. One young advisor attended the training twice, as a participant alongside the professionals, and said:

*I am coming from a young person's perspective in the group... I think that it's not an opinion that they expect to hear. I think if you are trying to provide a service for someone but you have never been the person in need of the service, if you have got someone that is working next to you that has been the recipient of the service, but is trying to understand how you give the service, then I might see something that they wouldn't. So I hope to think that, no one has told me, but I hope to think that me being there it does make a difference because I don't think it happens all the time.*  
(Young Advisor)

## Assessing the impact of the PLE work The training seminars and guide

The seminars were evaluated at the end of each session by the trainers and subsequently by the evaluation team via telephone interview and internet survey. A number of attendees also gave unsolicited and positive feedback to the U R Boss staff by email and phone. Feedback from all these sources was extremely positive about both the seminar and the guide. At the end of the seminar almost all participants reported that the training was relevant to their practice, that it had improved their knowledge of the law, had enhanced their ability to use

support and guidance to assist young people with resettlement issues, and increased their understanding of how practitioners can support young people. This was echoed by the survey and telephone interviews some months later when all survey respondents said they found the material relevant to their job and most felt confident to put their learning into practice.

People commented on how the guide and seminar were informative, accessible and (relatively) easy to understand, with people appreciating the passion the trainers had for the subject.

*Both are and have been extremely informative. The topic was delivered in an informal but informative way and was therefore easy to understand.  
(on the day evaluation)*

*It gave me insight into things I was not aware of, and started us looking at how the interventions work.  
(telephone interview)*

However, some found the material rather dense and heavy.

*It was very complicated stuff, I could follow to a fair degree, but at the end of the day it all blurred.  
(telephone interview)*

Many people said they had shared the information and guide with others since the seminar – hence increasing its distribution and possible impact. In the survey, respondents spoke of sharing the guide with team members, others in their organisation or with similar organisations.

*Just wanted to say thank you for the fantastic training last week – I have emailed the guide to the rest of the team!!  
(email)*

People also shared information about the Howard League with young people.

*Thanks again for the training, I have found it very useful and the Resettlement law book is now my bible! Would you be able to send me some of the leaflets with the legal helpline details on? I can then give them to young people I work with in custody. It would be good to know they can call and some may find they need to call for advice.  
(email)*

## **Using the information and learning**

It was hoped that the training would enable people to know when and how to take action

themselves and when legal advice was needed. At the end of the training sessions, participants clearly had a lot of ideas about how they intended to use the new information as part of their work.

The follow-up evaluation indicated that some participants had acted differently as a result of their new knowledge, with a number of people reporting specific circumstances where they had used the information learnt to positive effect for young people. Several participants were not currently in a position where they worked with young people directly, but reported sharing their learning with others in their organisation who did.

People reported referring to the guide for example to check guidance, timescales, the use of ROTL, local authority responsibilities, and young people's status and entitlements.

*Check guidance for s. 20 status and MAPPA procedures.  
(survey)*

*Highlight Social Services legal duties in relation to a particular case that were not being carried out and to help identify another young person as having LAC [Looked After Child] status under the new LASPO [Legal Aid Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders legislation].  
(survey)*

Some people had recognised a young person needed legal advice, when previously they might have dealt with the issue themselves. One example from the survey was a decision to approach a solicitor about an issue relating to mental health, other examples given include:

*It helped me understand where it is appropriate for someone like myself to challenge someone and when to get a solicitor for further legal advice.  
(telephone interview)*

*A young person was recalled (should have been the end of sentence) and [I] ensured he got support to put representations to parole board – which led to his release.  
(survey)*

Others reported having used the knowledge gained from the seminar to act differently in relation to legal requirements, to consider placements and accommodation options, or to have greater confidence to challenge others.

*I suppose it has given me a bit more ammunition to question people, which has been good.  
(telephone interview)*



Feedback from the legal team is that they have received referrals from some seminar attendees, including a significant increase from one organisation from which they had received seven referrals in four months since the training (compared to two in the previous twelve months). They were also able on some occasions to refer helpline callers to relevant sections of the Resettlement Guide. Both the guide and the seminar repeatedly emphasise that people should always consider referring matters to a solicitor early on, and the legal team has noticed some advocates referring cases much earlier than they had in the past. They also report that the training can empower workers to do more for the young people themselves, before contacting a solicitor, and while this can be beneficial – if they are able to quickly and successfully advocate with positive results – it could also be disadvantageous if young people who need legal advice get it late due to the worker trying to resolve the issue themselves.

### **Impact on young people**

All members of the Howard League and U R Boss spoken to as part of the evaluation were clear that the purpose of the work was to improve the resettlement experience for young people. By equipping practitioners with the knowledge and support to better advocate for young people, and to know when to seek appropriate advice, the intention was that young people would have improved outcomes.

While not everyone reported having used the information yet, a number of participants in both the telephone interviews and survey did report having taken different actions since attending the training, and many of these actions resulted in positive outcomes for the young people concerned. The benefits mentioned included: placements prior to release from custody, access to services they might not have had otherwise, and finding suitable accommodation.

One indirect consequence of the U R Boss work with young people in a YOI was that young people reported they could no longer access the Howard League helpline as the pin number had been removed from their list of approved numbers. U R Boss then contacted the YOI concerned as well as the Youth Justice Board, and the number was reinstated.

Through their involvement in producing the leaflets the young people have had

opportunities to develop skills in graphic design, communication and group work as well as gain a wider understanding of resettlement issues.

It is likely more young people will have heard of the Howard League's legal helpline as a result of the work – those involved in the production of the young people's leaflets and also some professionals who came to the training have given leaflets about the helpline and the work of the Howard League to young people. Individuals and organisations have asked for additional leaflets about the helpline and U R Boss to give to young people. One enquiry about becoming a young advisor has been received from another agency, as well.

### **Links with professionals and other organisations**

The PLE work on resettlement has enabled the Howard League to reach a broad audience of professionals working with young people, many of whom they would not have worked with previously.

*I had not heard of Howard League before, but they will be a valuable source of information in the future.  
(telephone interview)*

Attendance at the resettlement training gave the participants access to the range of support information available from the Howard League. All attendees at the training are signed up to the U R Boss Policy and Practice update – an e-bulletin sent out quarterly with relevant information and news about issues affecting young people in the justice system, and U R Boss activities.

Members of the legal team hoped that the PLE guide and training would increase the reputation and standing of the Howard League. This would appear to have been the case. In undertaking this PLE the Howard League has been able to more widely present itself as an organisation that can support and advise professionals – rather than one which is only about holding organisations to account.

*It is a very different stance for us because normally we are seen as the enemy.  
(legal team member)*

The increase in contact and the change in the nature of relationships with other organisations was recognised both inside and outside the Howard League. Before the start of the PLE, staff at the Howard League were concerned that some social workers might be reluctant to attend due

to possible antagonism towards the organisation if it had previously taken action (Judicial Review) against their local authority. However, the Howard League has made a lot of contacts through the training and publicity for the guide. U R Boss now has closer working relationships with some YOIs and NGOs, to which the PLE work is seen to have contributed. In this way the Howard League and U R Boss see that they are indirectly supporting more young people.

*That's our way of getting to young people, so then ultimately the main thing is we are helping more young people.  
(legal team member)*

*What it has managed to achieve for me personally, is to say, 'let's work together', that's what we should be doing as professionals... if we work together it is going to be more cost effective and we are going to benefit the young person at the end of the day. So it's a win/win situation.  
(telephone interview)*

Since attending the training a number of participants have contacted U R Boss suggesting closer collaboration.

*I feel that joint working between the establishment, the families and the Howard League will ultimately mean that the processes we put in place will ensure that the young people receive the best possible care and a real chance to change their futures.  
(email)*

The Youth Justice Board have published the guide on their website in their Effective Practice Library – an endorsement of its relevance and quality.

The development of the *What is MAPPA?* leaflet for young people has initiated discussions on promoting good practice with the lead person for MAPPA at the National Offender Management Service.

### **What next?**

The strong dissemination strategy for the young people's leaflets will continue. It is intended to continue to use the successful model of working with young people in custody to produce further young people's leaflets. While these are not yet decided possible topics arising from discussions with young people are 'How to make a complaint', and 'Adjudications'.

A number of people who have attended the training suggested there could be a need for a refresher course. It is possible there will be further guides for practitioners.

A critical development since the start of the PLE resettlement work is that as of 2 December 2013 legal aid will no longer be available for resettlement cases for young people while detained in custody. Therefore, the need for practitioners to be aware of the legal obligations resting with social services and other agencies is even more important. This change in legal aid funding will significantly increase the information needed in the public domain on resettlement law, as the number of solicitors available to take on cases will significantly decrease.

### **Concluding observations**

The PLE strand of work has brought together the Howard League legal team's specialist resettlement knowledge and experience with the expertise of the U R Boss workers in involving young people. This joint working has created useful resources for a wide range of professionals, and materials for young people on issues relating to resettlement. In the process it has helped to further embed the participative ethos of U R Boss within wider Howard League activity. While it has been a very valuable exercise, the PLE work has been resource intensive, for two main reasons: first, ensuring the accuracy and accessibility of all the materials, and second, negotiating the involvement of young people in custody in the development of resources for young people.

The feedback on the guide and training from professionals has been universally positive and there is some early evidence this has led to better resettlement outcomes for some very vulnerable young people. This highlights the value of education and training, and its subsequent identifiable influence on both awareness and practice. For some organisations the contact with the Howard League and U R Boss has created possibilities for closer working relationships. This work has also enabled the project to meet its objectives of widening its sphere of influence.

The innovative model of working with young people in custody has enabled young people in the justice system to have real influence over the material produced for their peers. This involvement of young people in the creation of concrete products appears to have led to personal gains for the young people concerned, although it is too early to be able comment on the use and impact of the leaflets on young people's circumstances.

The PLE resettlement work is illustrative of the U R Boss project's maturing approach to

participation and the involvement of young people. By being responsive to young people and listening to them, via the helpline and when giving legal advice, resettlement was identified as a relevant area for further development. The guide and training for professionals were both endorsed by young people. The group work with young people in custody enabled them to identify and develop resources specifically for their peers. Listening to children was integral to this work and integrated into the PLE resettlement strategy and approach.

The focus on resettlement for the PLE work is based on a synergy of young people's and Howard League concerns about the importance of resettlement for young people in custody. A recent report by the Beyond Youth Custody consortium<sup>2</sup> confirms the experience of the Howard League legal team, that getting resettlement right is vital for young people making the transition from custody back to their communities; both because of its continuing importance for their mental health and well-being, and its potential impact on their likelihood of reoffending. The role of PLE is vital in ensuring that young people and practitioners are equipped with as full a knowledge of their resettlement rights as possible, and are able to put this to use, especially given the current climate of service cuts and the reductions in funding for legal advice and support.

### About the authors

The Howard League for Penal Reform appointed a team from the Centre for Social Action at De Montfort University to evaluate U R Boss. This is the fourth interim report. It was prepared by Jennie Fleming, Co-Director of Practical Participation, Roger Smith, Professor of Social Work at the School of Applied Social Sciences, Durham University and Jean Hine, Reader in Criminology, De Montfort University.

### U R Boss interim evaluation reports

Welfare + Rights: U R Boss Legal Service  
Embedding participation  
U R Boss: Campaigning for change

### About the Howard League for Penal Reform

The Howard League for Penal Reform is a national charity working for less crime, safer communities and fewer people in prison. It is the oldest penal reform charity in the UK.

We campaign, research and take legal action on a wide range of issues. We work with parliament, the media, criminal justice professionals and members of the public, influencing debate and forcing through meaningful change.

Our legal team provides free, independent and confidential advice, assistance and representation on a wide range of issues to young people under 21 who are in prisons or secure children's homes and centres.

By becoming a member you will give us a bigger voice and give vital financial support to our work. We cannot achieve real and lasting change without your help.

Please visit [www.howardleague.org](http://www.howardleague.org) and join today.

### U R Boss

Part of the Howard League for Penal Reform, U R Boss supports young people in the criminal justice system to secure their legal rights and have an impact on policy and practice. Cover image shows a PLE training session.  
[www.urboss.org.uk/](http://www.urboss.org.uk/)

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> the evaluation data used in the report was collected by the end of August 2013.

<sup>2</sup> Beyond Youth Custody (2013) *Resettlement of Young People Leaving Custody*. Available at: <http://www.beyondyouthcustody.net/resources/publications/lessons-from-the-literature/> [Accessed: October 2013].

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