
Case Study: Sally(anonymised)

Background: Sally was referred to CWM TAF YJS Bureau after being arrested by North Wales Police while on holiday in a caravan. The police were responding to an incident involving Sally's mother, who was drunk and disorderly. During the police intervention, Sally attempted to protect her mother and was subsequently arrested for assaulting a police officer.

Incident Details: Sally explained that she was upset about her mother's arrest, did not understand what was happening, and wanted to protect her mother. She was unsure of the police's intentions and feared they would take her mother away. In her dysregulated state, Sally made verbal threats to harm the police and kicked the officers, leading to her being placed in handcuffs, taken to the police station, and kept overnight for her safety and well-being.

Impact of Trauma on Neurodevelopment: Trauma, especially during childhood, can have significant effects on a child's neurodevelopment. Sally has experienced considerable trauma, including the death of her father in 2017, which has likely contributed to her neurodevelopmental challenges. Trauma can affect the brain's development, leading to difficulties in emotional regulation, impulse control, and social interactions.

When a child experiences trauma, their brain may become hypervigilant, constantly on alert for potential threats. This can lead to heightened anxiety, difficulty in processing emotions, and an increased likelihood of reacting aggressively in stressful situations. Sally's reaction during the incident, where she attempted to protect her mother and subsequently assaulted the police officers, can be understood in this context. Her dysregulated state and aggressive behaviour were likely influenced by her traumatic experiences and neurodevelopmental challenges.

Relevance to the Offence: Sally's traumatic background and neurodevelopmental issues were highly relevant to the offence. Her reaction to her mother's arrest was a result of her inability to process the situation calmly and rationally. The fear of losing her mother, combined with her neurodevelopmental difficulties, led to her aggressive response. Understanding this context is crucial in addressing the root causes of her behaviour rather than simply criminalising her actions.

Consideration of Family Home Context: It is important to consider that if Sally had been living in a stable family home environment, this incident might not have come to the attention of the police. Children in family homes often have more support and stability, which can help mitigate the effects of trauma and neurodevelopmental challenges. Recognising this, the case manager and YJS police felt it was their duty to take Sally's background and circumstances into consideration when deciding on the appropriate response to the incident.

Restorative Options and Intervention Plan: The restorative options were discussed with the victims, and the following intervention plan was agreed upon:

- An RJ session with a YJS PC.

- Community reparation.
- A surrogate conference with a YJS PC.

Sally was receptive to RJ support through the YJS and agreed to engage in the intervention plan. Given that Sally does not leave home other than to attend school, the reparation session will be adapted to meet her needs at home, where she will complete a written project, as she enjoys writing and copying from books.

YJS Recommendation: The YJS recommended a CO22 based on Sally's diagnoses, complex needs, and the mitigating factors at the time of the incident, which involved her mother. The rationale for the CO22 recommendation included:

- The offences have a gravity score of 4, but several mitigating factors must be considered:
 - Sally has experienced considerable childhood trauma (death of her father).
 - Sally has mental health issues, learning needs, and neurodiversity diagnoses, as detailed within the assessment.
 - Sally is open to the Children with Disabilities (CWD) in Children's Services.
 - The offence occurred due to her mother being arrested, and Sally reacted aggressively and inappropriately during a traumatic and frightening experience.
 - Sally is highly susceptible to the influence of others and is vulnerable to exploitation.
 - Sally acknowledges that her behaviour was unacceptable and is willing to work with YJS and make amends.

Sally's DCT Social Worker also fully supported the CO22 recommendation.

Liaison with YJS Police and Decision on Sanction: The case manager liaised with the YJS police and agreed that the sanction should not be the gateway to the support Sally needs. Instead, they decided to provide a robust intervention to address the concerns without criminalising her. This approach aligns with the Youth Justice guidance to divert children away from formal sanctions and focus on their safety and well-being.

The Youth Justice Blueprint for Wales sets out a vision for youth justice in Wales, emphasising a 'children first' approach that is child-centred rather than service-focused. It aims to meet the individual needs of children and respond to their best interests. The Blueprint advocates for a trauma-informed approach throughout the various stages of the youth justice system, from prevention and early intervention to resettlement from custody. It recognises and responds to Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and indicators of complex need, embedding trauma-informed approaches into community and custodial practice to effect cultural and systemic change.

The CO22 outcome allows us to work together to manage future harmful behaviours and ensure Sally's safety and well-being without criminalizing her. The same level of support was offered regardless of the sanction. The victim was fully consulted and supported this outcome, as the aim was for Sally not to re-offend rather than be punished.

This case study highlights how Sally's background, mental health, and the circumstances surrounding the incident were taken into consideration. The intervention plan focuses on restorative justice and tailored support to help Sally make amends and avoid future incidents.