Evaluation of Community Youth Programmes: Summary Report

MINISTRY OF
JUSTICE
Tāhū o te Ture

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A report prepared for the Ministry of Justice

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides a summary and discussion of the key findings from evaluations of five Community Youth Programmes. The programmes were funded by the Ministry of Justice through the Crime Prevention Unit (CPU), and the New Zealand Police. An independent team evaluated these programmes from 2003 to 2006.

Although all programmes aimed to reduce youth offending by using a case management model, the providers delivered quite different programmes.

Originally, all evaluations were to include formative, process and outcome evaluation phases. However, not all the phases were completed, for several reasons, including: the funding of two programmes being withdrawn part-way through their evaluations; programme staff changes; a lack of suitable programme records; and difficulty in determining offending histories. Two of the five programmes had formative evaluations and the others had formative and process evaluations.

The findings from these evaluations show that working in the youth justice sector is challenging and complex. The evaluations identified areas where the programmes could be improved. They also identified several areas in which practices could be improved if they were addressed by programme providers, the youth justice sector and funding agencies.

These areas relate to:

- how providers are selected by funding agencies;
- the responsibilities of the programme providers;
- how funding agencies support providers;
- building the capacity of the providers;
- building the capacity of the youth justice sector; and
- enhancing inter-agency collaboration.

Selection of programme provider

Having few established providers from which to choose and a lack of clear selection criteria when programme providers were being selected affected the provision of programmes.

All of the providers were new to the youth justice sector, they did not have personnel experienced in working with young offenders, and they developed their programmes with little support from funding agencies.

The future selection and funding of providers in the youth justice sector should include a robust assessment of provider capability. If funding agencies select providers with known skill gaps, they then need to ensure that the providers receive adequate support to remedy the shortcomings.

Responsibilities of programme providers

The providers were trying to meet the needs of young people who had a medium to high risk of offending. Providers who did not clearly understand their target group or how the intended outcomes of their programmes would be met, found it difficult to develop and deliver their programmes. In particular, programme providers need to:

- identify the target group for their services and understand best practice principles in working with that group;

- develop procedures for accurately and usefully assessing programme particpants' psycho-social risk factors for offending;

- deliver a programme that responds to the needs of the participants, with activities explicitly linked to the overall goal of reducing offending;

- implement appropriate systems for monitoring the progress or otherwise of programme participants towards their goals.

Supporting programme providers

Funding agencies have a responsibility to work with selected providers in an ongoing relationship to support the contracted programmes to succeed. This is especially so in areas such as youth justice, where external support networks for providers are limited.

The providers needed assistance and support to develop their organisational infrastructure, programmes, relationships with other agencies, and staff capability.

The funding agencies share the responsibility for programme outcomes with providers, and as such are responsible for:

- communicating the vision for the programme and their intentions about how those outcomes will be achieved to prospective providers;

- providing adequate funding for programmes, with clear guidelines on how the funding should be used, and helping to develop appropriate procedures for managing programme costs and expenditure;

- undertaking a robust process of provider selection that includes an assessment of their current capability;

- having a commitment to addressing known skill gaps and providing targeted support to selected providers;

- providing ongoing assistance to providers to support the successful implementation of their programmes or services.

Capacity building for providers

The evaluation team identified the following areas for provider capacity building:

- developing comprehensive and holistic programmes based on a clear programme logic, linking activities directly to the goal of reducing youth offending;

- building provider knowledge, expertise and skills related to reducing youth offending;

- improving provider assessment practice to include the assessment of psycho-social risk factors for youth offending;

- establishing client information systems that enable staff to monitor and report on clients' participation and progress/success in programmes; and

- developing policies and procedures that support the effective administration and delivery of programmes.

It is noted that some providers were beginning to address some of these areas at the time the evaluation finished in 2006.

Capacity building in the youth justice sector

These evaluations also identified gaps in the youth justice sector that have limited the ability of new providers to develop and deliver their programmes.

The following areas for capacity building in the Youth Justice sector have been identified:

- developing NZQA accredited training programmes;

- developing standards of practice and ethical guidelines;

- developing guidelines for supervision of youth justice workers;

- ongoing development of models of good practice; and

- adopting standardised assessment tools for diagnosing the needs of young offenders.

Inter-agency collaboration

All providers had significant difficulties when working with other organisations, many of them government agencies. Greater cooperation and collaboration is needed nationally and locally between youth justice providers and organisations. Providers need the support and assistance of a wide range of organisations to provide programmes that can help to reduce youth re-offending.

Developing a more coherent and connected youth justice sector would promote greater inter-agency collaboration and might give government agencies some formalised mechanisms for communication. This would widen providers' and government agencies' networks and create stronger inter-agency collaboration.

1.   INTRODUCTION

This report summarises five evaluations of Community Youth Programmes[1]. The providers of these programmes were funded by the Ministry of Justice through the Crime Prevention Unit, and the New Zealand Police. An independent team evaluated these programmes from 2003 to 2006.

1.1   Background

In 2002, the Government decided to fund 'Community Youth Programmes' to reduce youth offending. Officials from the Ministry of Justice and New Zealand Police (NZ Police) were directed to consult with local authorities and community groups and develop programmes targeting youth offenders in areas with high youth crime and social deprivation.

It was agreed that the programmes would be developed according to the following principles:

- *Capacity Building* – the design and development of the projects to be driven at a community level, with the CPU and Police providing advisory and technical support;

- *Reducing Inequalities* – projects, where possible, to be consistent with government goals to reduce inequalities experienced by Māori and Pacific peoples;

- *Reducing Youth Offending* – to reduce the number of young people in the criminal justice system, and to increase the number of young people exiting the criminal justice system; and

- Holistic interventions – interventions to include aspects related to improving young people's health, education and welfare.

NZ Police and Ministry of Justice officials agreed to develop a process that would support and increase the capacity and capability of providers to deliver their programmes.

Fourteen Community Youth Programmes were funded in 2003. Ten of the 14 programmes were selected for evaluation in 2003. The Ministry of Justice oversaw the evaluation of five programmes[2]. This report refers to the findings of the five evaluations undertaken on behalf the Ministry of Justice.

1.2   Community Youth Programmes

All providers aimed to reduce youth offending by using a case management model. This meant developing individualised programmes for participants that were based on several key activities selected by providers.

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[1]   This report summarises the findings from five Community Youth Programme evaluation reports and an overview report, prepared for the Ministry of Justice by Trish Young. The evaluation team consisted of Trish Young, Bev Burns, Chris Malins and Barbara Thomas.

[2]   Individual evaluation reports were presented to the five Community Youth Programme providers by the evaluators.

The five programmes are described below as they were at the time the evaluation was undertaken.

Moemoea o te Tangata Programme

The Moemoea o te Tangata Programme included the following key activities:

- mentoring;
- education;
- cultural activities;
- outdoor adventure activities; and
- sporting activities.

All participants had individual plans that included a combination of the above activities. They also had access to on-site health and counselling services. A local Maori community social services agency supported and assisted participants' whanau/families.

The evaluation of the Moemoea o Te Tangata programme included formative and process phases.

Individually Tailored Plan Programme

The programme involved case workers working with young people and their whānau/families to engage participants in social activities including attending school or alternative learning centres and participating in a marae-based youth programme. The marae-based programme included an outdoor camp and cultural activities. Case workers were also mentors for the young people.

The evaluation of the Individually Tailored Plan programme included both formative and process phases.

Incogneato Youth Support Programme

This programme aimed to enhance young people's ability to think and problem-solve, as well as to heighten their sense of self-awareness. The programme was based on the belief that young people who had the skills to understand their thinking and behaviour would be less likely to re-offend.

Funding for this programme was withdrawn part-way through the evaluation because the provider did not fulfil the minimum contract requirements. The Incogneato Youth Support Programme therefore underwent only a formative evaluation.

Kaitiaki Tangata Programme

This programme originally provided a range of activities that included education, employment, sports and counselling. Part-way through the evaluation, this programme

changed significantly to include a strong focus on participants' whakapapa[3]. These activities were co-ordinated by a kaitiaki who worked with the young people and their whānau. The kaitiaki also provided mentoring for the young people.

The evaluation of the Kaitiaki Tangata programme included both formative and process phases.

Mou Tonu Atu te Tika Programme

This programme began with assessment hui for each young person. The information from the hui was then used to develop individual plans which consisted of three main elements:

- social work;

- adventure therapy camps; and

- Maori culture.

Funding for this programme was withdrawn part-way through the evaluation because the provider did not fulfil the minimum contract requirements. The Mou Tonu Atu te Tika programme had a formative evaluation only.

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[3] Whakapapa refers to geneology.

2. FINDINGS

Originally, all evaluations were to include formative, process and outcome evaluation phases. However, not all the phases were completed, for several reasons, including: funding for two programmes was withdrawn part-way through their evaluations; programme staff changes; a lack of suitable programme records: and difficulty in determining offending histories. Two of the five programmes had formative evaluations and the remaining three had formative and process evaluations.

The findings have been presented under the following headings:

- target clients;

- assessment;

- delivery;

- monitoring; and

- inter-agency collaboration.

2.1 Target clients

Funders intended that the programmes would target young people who were involved in offending that was considered to be medium to serious level offending. This was not clear to the programme providers, who were uncertain if their programme should target serious offenders, recidivist offenders or those 'at risk' - before offending behaviours became entrenched. Providers were also confused about the extent to which they should be working with programme participants' families.

Findings

Programmes were not fully effective when the target group had not been clearly identified. Focus was lost when providers tried to meet the diverse needs of too a wide range of programme participants or goals.

In addition, some programmes tried to address particularly complicated problems, for example those linked to alcohol and drug use, or violent offending. Addressing the needs of young people who have these issues is complex and difficult, and might require specialist services. Programme staff need to ensure they are up-to-date with theory and best practice in youth offending or youth at risk, and have access to required professional assistance.

2.2 Assessment

Robust, valid and reliable assessment is critical when developing effective programmes that reduce the likelihood of re-offending. Before starting a programme, participants need to be assessed to establish why they have offended, why they have been referred to the programme, their risk factors and areas of strength. Programmes that aim to reduce re-offending need to identify the psycho-social risk factors for offending and then develop a

programme that not only addresses these risk factors, but also enhances resilience and pro-social behaviours.

Findings

The evaluation team identified assessment as a key area for future capacity building for these providers and for the youth justice sector.

Psycho-social risk factors for offending

All five programmes needed their assessment practices to include assessment of the psycho-social risk factors for offending. Most programmes had informal assessment practices that built an overall picture of each participant, but not necessarily in the context of their offending. This might be partly because youth justice providers did not have a standardised assessment tool.

Family Group Conference referrals

Some providers did not assess participants if they had been referred through a Family Group Conference (FGC), because they had already been assessed and a plan had been developed as part of the FGC process. This meant that these providers could not add extra value to the plan and/or understand the connection between the planned interventions in the FGC plan and reducing the young person's offending.

2.3 Delivery

Caseworkers need to make tangible links between the needs of participants, the development of a programme, the role of the whanau within the programme, and the overall goal of reducing re-offending.

Findings

All the providers were relatively inexperienced in working with young offenders or delivering youth justice programmes. They sought little advice for programme development and had developed their programmes from the ground up. In some cases, staff had limited ability to administer and implement programmes. All providers said they had found the work with young people more complex and intensive than they initially expected.

While the evaluators found that programme staff showed some skill in their work, they concluded that staff would benefit from more training to improve their skills. In particular, programme staff needed to become more proficient in the use of therapeutic interventions.

Clarity of programme goals

Providers delivered their programmes within a case management model, which consisted of young people participating in a range of activities and, in some instances, accessing external support services. Providers found it difficult to describe the relationship between their programme activities and the overall goal of reducing youth offending. This meant that the providers were not clear about how their programmes helped the young people to address

their offending. This was exacerbated by some providers not clearly understanding the target group for their programme.

The explicit use of intervention logic models[4] could have helped programme providers to clarify the purpose of their programme activities and how the planned activities would help the young people reduce their offending.

<u>The inclusion of cultural components in the programme</u>

One of the key principles for the design and development of these programmes was to reduce inequalities experienced by Māori and Pacific young people. All providers were Māori and said they aimed to strengthen their Māori participants' cultural identity. No programmes had included specific cultural provision for Pacific young people.

All providers included some Māori cultural components in their programmes. The range of cultural components varied between providers, but included: te reo, tikanga (as relevant to specific situations), some Marae protocol, kapahaka, learning about whakapapa, telling of historical stories, learning about the Treaty of Waitangi, collecting kai, hospitality, and some sporting activities. Young people generally had the option to participate or not participate in the cultural components.

The purpose of including these aspects of cultural components was unclear. Using a tool such as an intervention logic model might have helped clarify the purpose and expected results of the activities. The evaluators concluded that providers assumed that participation in cultural activities was linked to reducing Māori youth offending. This assumption was generalised for all participants, regardless of their individual circumstances. Linked to this assumption was the belief that young people without strong iwi cultural links did not have a culture and needed to learn about 'being Maori' to be more healthy and socially well-adjusted. The cultural components of the programmes did not always reflect the diverse realities of Māori, the complex factors behind youth offending and the emergence of a tangible Māori urban culture.

2.4   Monitoring

A key part of monitoring effectiveness is being able to identify in incremental steps a young person's progress on a programme. This is important when working with young people and their whanau/families. Evidence a young person is making noticeable positive changes can be extremely motivating for bringing about meaningful long-term change; it can be very de-motivating to not have progress recognised. Information about progress is also needed when reviewing the overall effectiveness of a programme and can be used to identify areas of programme strength and weakness.

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4   Intervention logic models are a means of systematically describing causal links between programme activities and planned outcomes.

Findings

All of the providers found it difficult to identify and measure the immediate and intermediate outcomes of their programmes in valid and reliable ways. A lack of skill in recording meaningful information meant programme providers could not provide the young people, their whanau/families, the funding agencies or the evaluation team with outcome information on the effectiveness of their programmes. Providers tended to record output information, such as attendance on courses, and not include information about behavioural or attitudinal changes that linked to the goal of reduced offending.

These issues were exacerbated when providers were unable to develop and implement an electronic client data base to help them with monitoring and reporting. They also affected how well they could fulfil the six-monthly reporting requirements for the CPU or the New Zealand Police.

2.5   Inter-agency collaboration

Working well with other agencies is an essential part of delivering an effective, holistic programme for youth offenders. To meet all of the needs of young people, providers need to have access to a wide range of services and skills that are often held by other agencies. This means that providers need to have cooperative and collaborative relationships and networks within the youth justice sector as well as those in the wider service sector, including education, health, social services and employment.

Findings

How effectively providers collaborated with other agencies to support their young people varied. Some providers had excellent relationships with agencies and their communities, others were developing their relationships and one provider had limited relationships with their community.

Challenges to effective inter-agency collaboration

All providers identified inter-agency collaboration as an area they wanted to develop further. The following issues were identified by all or most of the providers when engaging with other groups:

- Education – all providers said it was very difficult to get cooperation and collaboration with educational services, including local schools, Group Special Education (GSE) and other support services. Providers spent a lot of time trying to re-integrate or re-enrol young people back into school. When young people were not enrolled in a school, there were particular difficulties in accessing appropriate support agencies.

- Psychological services – providers found it difficult to identify appropriate psychological services for young people and some did not know how to access funding for these services.

- Youth Offending Teams – most of the providers did not know about Youth Offending Teams, their purpose, or that they could work with these teams. This limited the opportunities to make useful links with other youth justice services.

- Police Youth Aid – most of the providers had some difficulties developing and maintaining functional relationships with local Police Youth Aid staff. In two areas, providers felt there were tensions between services for youth provided by community programmes, and Police youth programmes. Providers also felt that Police at a national level did not promote an awareness of these community programmes or give sufficient information to Police Youth Aid staff about how to support or work with them. Some Police Youth Aid staff indicated they were reluctant to refer young people to community programmes because of concerns about providers' professionalism or levels of skill in working with young offenders.

3.   DISCUSSION

Services for youth offenders need to be comprehensive and holistic to meet the multi-layered and complex needs of young people and their whanau/families. The evaluations identified areas where the overall effectiveness of the programmes could be improved. They also identified several areas that, if addressed by programme providers, the agencies that fund these programmes, and others in youth justice sector, could improve practices in these areas.

3.1   Programme selection

According to the selection criteria for Community Youth programmes, the New Zealand Police and the Ministry of Justice were to "…use local resources to identify existing programmes that are having some success…". Officials from New Zealand Police and the Ministry of Justice were required to "develop a strategic process to support and increase the capacity of the programmes, and the capability of the service providers to improve crime reduction outcomes". If there were no existing services in targeted areas, officials were to "…work with the selected communities to develop new services using best practice processes available in other areas in New Zealand".

It appears that at the time of selection there were few established providers from which to choose, resulting in the selection of providers who were all new to working in the youth justice sector. The evaluation findings illustrate that these providers had significant challenges implementing and delivering their programmes; developing their organisational infrastructure; establishing relationships with other agencies; and increasing staff capability.

It is important to note that it can be difficult for government agencies to provide community programmes with the autonomy to develop local solutions, while also giving the support needed to develop and deliver effective programmes. These evaluations have identified that these programmes required significantly more support from the funding agencies to manage and deliver appropriate services to their clients. Funding agencies have a responsibility to provide ongoing support for programme providers. This is especially so in areas such as youth justice, where there is limited external support for providers.

The future selection and funding of providers in the youth justice sector should include a robust assessment of the current capability of providers. This information should be used to select and then support successful providers. If funding agencies select providers with known skill gaps, they need to make a commitment to work with those providers to rectify the shortcomings.

3.2 Responsibilities of programme providers

The providers were trying to meet the needs of young people who were involved in offending that was considered to be medium to serious level offending. Where providers did not clearly understand their target group or how the intended outcomes of their programmes would be met, they had significant challenges developing and delivering their programmes. In particular, programme providers need to:

- identify the target group for their services and understand best practice principles in working with that group;

- develop procedures for accurately and usefully assessing their clients' psycho-social risk factors for offending;

- deliver a programme that responds to the needs of the participants, with activities explicitly linked to the overall goal of reducing offending;

- implement appropriate systems for monitoring the progress or otherwise of programme participants towards their goals.

3.3 Supporting programme providers

As outlined above, the providers in this report believed they needed more support than the funding agencies gave them. All providers said they were new to the youth justice sector and had developed their programmes with little external support.

The funding agencies share the responsibility for the delivery and outcomes with providers, and as such are responsible for:

- communicating the vision for reducing youth offending and their intentions on how these outcomes will be achieved to prospective providers;

- providing adequate funding for programmes with clear guidelines on how the funding should be used, and support for developing appropriate procedures for managing programme costs and expenditure;

- undertaking a robust selection process of providers that includes an assessment of their current capability;

- having a commitment to fixing known skill gaps and providing targeted support to selected providers;

- providing ongoing assistance to providers to support the successful implementation of their programmes or services.

3.4 Capacity building for providers

Working with youth offenders is challenging and complex. Youth justice providers need to be highly skilled, knowledgeable and 'networked' to work with young people and their whanau/families to make meaningful life changes.

The evaluation team identified the following areas for capacity building for the providers:

- developing comprehensive and holistic programmes based on a clear programme logic, linking activities directly to the goal of reducing youth offending;

- building provider knowledge, expertise and skills related to reducing youth offending;

- improving provider assessment practice to include the assessment of psycho-social risk factors for youth offending;

- establishing client information systems that enable staff to monitor and report on clients' participation and progress/success in programmes; and

- developing policies and procedures that support the effective administration and delivery of programmes.

Some providers were beginning to address some of these areas when the evaluations finished in 2006.

3.5 Capacity building for the youth justice sector

These evaluations have identified gaps in the youth justice sector that have affected how well new providers have been able to develop and deliver their programmes.

Resources that would support capacity building for providers in the youth justice sector include:

- development of NZQA-accredited training programmes;

- development of standards of practice and ethical guidelines;

- development of guidelines for supervision of youth justice workers;

- ongoing development of models of good practice; and

- development of a standardised assessment tool for youth offenders.

3.6 Inter-agency collaboration

All providers had significant challenges when working with other organisations, many of them government agencies. Greater cooperation and collaboration is needed nationally and locally between youth justice providers and agencies. Providers need the support and assistance of a wide range of agencies to deliver programmes that reduce youth re-offending.

Development of a more coherent and connected youth justice sector would improve inter-agency collaboration and might give government agencies some formalised mechanisms for communication with Non-Government Organisations and programme providers. This would widen providers' and government agencies' networks and create a stronger platform for inter-agency collaboration.

4. CONCLUSION

These evaluations have identified several areas for improvement for providers, the youth justice sector and agencies that fund programmes for young offenders.

Youth who are at risk of re-offending need providers who are not only committed to them, but also who have the specialist skills and knowledge of working with youth offenders to assess, develop and deliver a programme that meets their needs.

Providers need to have effective relationships with other providers and agencies to access services and supports for their participants. Providers also need guidance and resources to help them grow and self-review their practice, such as appropriate assessment tools and practice guidelines.

Funding agencies share responsibility with providers for the success of programmes. This shared responsibility places obligations on funding agencies to have a rigorous selection process for providers, provide adequate funding, and develop ongoing relationships with providers that help them to work effectively with young people and their whanau/families to reduce youth offending.