



Examples of promising interventions for reducing offending, in particular Indigenous juvenile offending

Prepared for the Senate Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs: Inquiry into the value of a justice reinvestment approach to criminal justice in Australia

JUST REINVEST NSW

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Introduction

Just Reinvest NSW has produced this paper for the Inquiry by the Senate Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs into the value of a justice reinvestment approach to criminal justice in Australia. Just Reinvest NSW presented to the Inquiry on 1 May 2013, and was requested to provide to the Inquiry information on evaluations of programs that have been proven to reduce offending.

The paper provides seven case studies of promising interventions to reduce offending. Given the focus of Just Reinvest NSW, the paper focuses on case studies provided for Indigenous juveniles in Australia. However research from comparable jurisdictions is also discussed as well as programs for Indigenous adult offenders. Included are case studies across the primary, secondary and tertiary stages of crime prevention.¹

¹ Many of the case studies in this paper were drawn from the Indigenous Justice Clearinghouse Research Brief 'Promising interventions for reducing Indigenous juvenile offending' (See References section for full reference). This paper also follows a similar structure to the Brief.

1 Primary crime prevention strategies aim to prevent offending before it begins

Primary prevention strategies focus on social or situational factors²:

- Social strategies focus on factors that influence individuals' likelihood of committing a crime³
- Situational strategies focus on altering the physical environment to reduce criminal opportunities⁴

Primary prevention strategies are particularly important for Indigenous juveniles given their young offending profile⁵ and long-term contact with the criminal justice system.⁶ Many primary prevention strategies exist in Indigenous communities throughout Australia, but very few have been adequately evaluated.⁷ Two primary prevention programs that have been evaluated are the *Pathways to Prevention Project* and the *Kowanayama and Palm Island Justice Groups*.

1.1 Pathways to Prevention Project

Background

The Pathways to Prevention Project was developed based on strong evidence that problem behaviour by young children is one of the strongest predictors of both adolescent delinquency and later adult offending.⁸ The project began in 2001, targeting four to six year old children in the most disadvantaged urban area in Queensland who were in transition to school. Although the project was not designed exclusively for Indigenous juveniles, the area in which it was based (the Brisbane suburb of Inala) has a high percentage of Indigenous residents (approximately 7 per cent).⁹ The stated aims of the project are to:

1. Promote the capacity for children and youth to achieve their potential
2. Avoid poor outcomes in health, education, behaviour and crime, and the resultant costs to society
3. Promote positive parenting
4. Encourage healthy family relationships
5. Enhance children's readiness for school
6. Reduce adolescent involvement in criminal activity in the longer term
7. Reduce social isolation experienced by families.

Programs include:

² Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC) 2003. 'Approaches to understanding crime prevention'. *Crime Reduction Matters No. 1*. Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology <http://www.aic.gov.au/documents/D/5/A/%7BD5A879FA-16B0-4350-933E-8A8634949F51%7Dcrim001.pdf>

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Richards K, 2011. 'Trends in juvenile detention in Australia'. *Trends and Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice No. 416*. Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology <http://www.aic.gov.au/publications/current%20series/tandi/401-420/tandi416.html>

⁶ Livingstone M, et al 2008. 'Understanding juvenile offending trajectories'. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Criminology* 41(3): 345-363

⁷ Richards K, et al 2011. 'Promising interventions for reducing Indigenous juvenile offending'. *Research Brief 10*. Indigenous Justice Clearinghouse <http://www.indigenousjustice.gov.au/briefs/brief010.pdf>

⁸ Homel R, et al 2006. 'The Pathways to Prevention project: doing developmental prevention in a disadvantaged community'. *Trends and Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice No. 323*. Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology <http://www.aic.gov.au/documents/8/1/0/%7B810F4BC4-F62C-479B-8315-883A6FEC3183%7Dtandi323.pdf>

⁹ Richards K, above n 6.

- Individual support and counselling for both adults and children
- Behaviour management programs for parents, both formal and informal
- Early childhood initiatives such as playgroups
- Family support group programs
- Programs for children and youth
- Programs to link families with schools such as: Supporting Kids in Language and Literacy Skills (SKILLS) and Helping your Child Succeed at School
- Broad-based community development initiatives.

Outcomes

Evaluation of the project in 2006 found that children's communication skills had improved, their levels of difficult behaviour decreased and there were fewer children at risk of severe behavioural problems.¹⁰ The evaluation used the Juvenile Justice Simulation Model to show that the reduction in the number of children at risk of severe behavioural problems would result in a 21 per cent reduction in juvenile offending in the target community.¹¹

1.2 Kowanyama and Palm Island Justice Groups

Background

Kowanyama and Palm Island Community Justice Groups were introduced in 1993 in response to high levels of drug abuse, family violence and property crime in remote Indigenous communities.¹² The groups were developed and implemented to deal with justice issues by way of customary practices. They involved community consultation and consisted of Indigenous community members and a community development officer. The groups undertook a variety of roles, including primary prevention activities such as conflict resolution, conducting night patrols, and settling family disputes.

Outcomes

An evaluation of the program was conducted using interviews with those involved in the groups and the wider community, as well as analysis of police and corrections records.¹³ In the majority, those involved in the group were very positive about the effect of the groups in reducing crime in the Kowanyama and Palm Island communities.¹⁴ These claims were supported by police records, which indicated a substantial decrease in:

- Charges against juveniles (from 40-50 per month for each month prior to March 1994 to four charges in April 1995)
- Break and enters (from 207 incidences in 1993 to 37 in 1994)
- Stealing charges (from 123 incidences in 1993 to 11 in 1994)
- Receiving stolen goods (from 179 incidences in 1993 to two in 1994)
- The number of court appearances in both locations between 1993-4 and 1996-7.¹⁵

¹⁰ Homel R, et al, above n 10.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Cunneen C, 2001. *The Impact of Crime Prevention on Aboriginal Communities*. Sydney: Institute of Criminology; cited by Richards K, et al, above n 6.

¹³ Gant, F & Grabosky, P 2000. *The promise of crime prevention (2nd ed) Research and Public Policy Series No. 31*. Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology; cited in Richards K, et al, above n 6.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

2 Secondary crime prevention strategies aim to address existing problem behaviour

Secondary prevention strategies are predominately aimed at individuals regarded as ‘at high risk of embarking on a criminal career.’¹⁶ They may also seek to reduce crime before it reaches the notice of authorities or becomes more serious.¹⁷ Two secondary prevention programs that have been evaluated are the *Panyappi Indigenous Youth Mentoring Project* and the *Gwich’in Outdoor Classroom*, a program from Canada.

2.1 Panyappi Indigenous Youth Mentoring Project

Background

The Panyappi Indigenous Youth Mentoring Project (Panyappi) was implemented in Adelaide in 2001 as an Indigenous youth mentoring service for young people who experience multiple problems that lead them to frequent inner city or other suburban hangouts, placing them at risk of being a victim of crime or engaging in offending behaviour.¹⁸ Most of the young people with whom Panyappi works are disengaging or already disengaged from education, have a high rate of social-emotional issues, and often engage in substance misuse.

The program aims to:

- intervene in pathways of offending behaviour;
- decrease juveniles’ contact with the justice system;
- promote self-discovery and self-determination; and
- work with relevant agencies to help juveniles.

The program matches an Indigenous mentor with each juvenile. The mentors work intensively with juveniles, primarily by connecting them with relevant local services.

Outcomes

Panyappi was evaluated in 2004 through a series of personal interviews and focus groups with all key stakeholders, including young people, family members, program staff, program collaborators, program funders and Advisory Group Members.¹⁹ Program statistics, client demographics and program documentation were also reviewed and analysed.

Qualitative data indicated that the frequency and severity of the offending by participants in the program had significantly decreased.²⁰ In addition, qualitative data indicated that a range of other benefits had resulted from Panyappi, including stronger family relationships and better connections with school.²¹

¹⁶ Australian Institute of Criminology, above n 1.

¹⁷ Richards K, et al, above n 6.

¹⁸ Stacey K and Associates 2004. *Panyappi Indigenous youth mentoring program: External evaluation report*. Adelaide: South Australia Department of Human Services. <http://www.dfc.sa.gov.au/Pub/Portals/7/panyappiindigenous-youth-mentoring-programexternal-evaluation-report.pdf>; cited by Richards K, et al, above n 6.

¹⁹ Ibid

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

Reductions in offending were confirmed through quantitative data with substantial decreases in formal cautions, court orders, family conferences and convictions.²² The greater majority (12 young people or 80 per cent) decreased their rate of offending by 25 per cent or more – often much more (70 – 100 per cent).²³ Five participants had not offended since their involvement with Panyappi. This achievement was particularly noteworthy given the very high rates of offending for some of these participants over the previous one to three years. It should be noted, however, that the evaluation was only able to analyse the offending records of 15 participants, and no comparison or control group was used.²⁴

2.2 Gwich'in Outdoor Classroom

Background

The Gwich'in Outdoor Classroom (Gwich'in) was a culture-based crime prevention program that ran from 1999-2004 in two remote First Nations communities in the Northwest Territories of Canada.²⁵ The project was designed for First Nations children aged 6 to 12 who faced multiple risk factors associated with crime, such as a lack of attachment to school and to community role models, addictions, involvement in youth gangs and lack of parental support. The program included:

- an outdoor camp
- a morning breakfast program
- an in-school program involving Elders teaching life and communication skills;
- and traditional learning.

Gwich'in has been recognised as an example of best practice by the the Australian Human Rights Commission.²⁶

Outcomes

The program was evaluated in 2004 using a pre- and post-test design and comparison group.²⁷ It was not possible to directly measure impacts of the program on offending levels as participants were below the age of criminal responsibility.²⁸ However the evaluation did find statistically significant differences in the school achievement and attendance levels of children who participated in the program.²⁹ This is a promising finding given the abundance of evidence that higher levels of school attendance and achievements are linked to lower levels of criminality among young people.³⁰

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Richards K, et al, above n 6.

²⁵ Public Safety Canada 2007. *Gwich'in Outdoor Classroom Project*. Ottawa: Public Safety Canada. [http:// www.publicsafety.gc.ca/prg/cp/bldngevd/2007-es-10-eng.aspx](http://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/prg/cp/bldngevd/2007-es-10-eng.aspx)

²⁶ Calma T 2008. Preventing crime and promoting rights for Indigenous young people with cognitive disabilities and mental health issues. Sydney: Australian Human Rights Commission http://www.hreoc.gov.au/social_justice/publications/preventing_crime/index.html; cited by Richards K, et al, above n 6.

²⁷ Richards K, et al, above n 6.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Delfabbro P & Day A 2003. *Programs for anti-social youth in Australia and New Zealand: A literature review*. Stockholm: Centre for Evaluation of Social Services; cited by Richards K, et al, above n 6.

3 Tertiary crime prevention strategies aim to reduce offending by intervening in the lives of known offenders

Tertiary prevention strategies focus on the operation of the criminal justice system and deal with offending after it has occurred.³¹ Examples include restorative justice measures, community-based sanctions and rehabilitation initiatives.³² Three tertiary prevention programs that have been evaluated are the *Intensive Supervision Program* provided by the NSW Department of Juvenile Justice, the *New Horizons: Indigenous high intensity sexual offending program* and *Back on Track: Indigenous medium intensity sexual offending program* provided by Queensland Corrective Services and the *Violent Offender Therapeutic Program* provided by Corrective Services NSW.

3.1 Intensive Supervision Program

Background

Multisystemic Therapy (MST) is “an intensive family- and community-based treatment program that focuses on the entire world of chronic and violent juvenile offenders — their homes and families, schools and teachers, neighbourhoods and friends.”³³ MST aims to develop the skills of caregivers to address the systemic factors that cause problematic behaviour – including substance abuse, financial stress, housing issues and family conflict. Principles for intervention include:

- focusing on strengths
- increasing responsible behaviours among all family members
- making action oriented and developmentally appropriate interventions; and
- requiring the family to make daily or weekly efforts.

MST is a program distributed under licence by the *Multisystemic Therapy Institute* (a non-profit company), which provides training to MST providers to ensure program integrity. Based on the successes of MST in other countries, the Intensive Supervision Program (ISP) was established by the NSW Department of Juvenile Justice in 2008 as a four-year pilot project in Newcastle and Werrington. The program is aimed at juveniles between the ages of 10 and 14 who have committed serious or repeat offences, with a particular focus on Indigenous offenders. Trained clinicians deliver the program aided by Aboriginal advisers who advise on specific cultural issues and monitor interventions to ensure a culturally safe environment for participants.

Outcomes

As at 30 June 2011, 87 families had signed up to the program since May 2008 with a 90 per cent completion rate. Preliminary research indicated a 60 per cent drop in offending by young people during the life of the program, and a 74 per cent drop during the six months after completing the program.³⁴ In addition, data collected by the Multisystemic Therapy Institute indicates that as at December 2009 87

³¹ Australian Institute of Criminology, above n 1.

³² Ibid.

³³ Multisystemic Therapy website, <http://mstservices.com/>

³⁴ Debus, B (2011) “Speech Notes for Institute of Criminology Seminar – Aboriginal Young People and Crime” 7 February, 2011 at <<http://www.djj.nsw.gov.au/presentations/Bob%20Debus.pdf>>

per cent of caregivers had acquired the appropriate parenting skills necessary to handle future problems; 78 per cent had improved family relations; and 70 per cent had improved support networks.³⁵

The success of the program was acknowledged in the *Doing time – time for doing* Report released by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs in 2011. The report stated that ISP has achieved success in:

- reducing offending by those young people that complete the program;
- teaching caregivers the appropriate parenting skills necessary to handle future problems; and
- improving family relations and support networks³⁶

3.2 New Horizons: Indigenous high intensity sexual offending program and Back on Track: Indigenous medium intensity sexual offending program

Background

The New Horizons and Back on Track programs target psychological, social and lifestyle factors associated with sexual offending.³⁷ They are specifically designed to accommodate cultural, custom or language considerations relevant to Indigenous offenders.

The program encourages participants to take responsibility for their offending, develop motivation to change, understand and acknowledge victim harm, challenge and change offence-related beliefs and attitudes, improve relationship skills, learn to effectively manage emotions and impulsive urges, improve their problem solving and develop realistic self management plans for their safe release and positive life goals.

The programs involve a cultural advisor who attends the group and works with the program facilitators to promote cultural awareness. Both programs are offered in selected north-Queensland custodial centres.

Outcomes

Intermediate treatment outcomes for the New Horizons and Back on Track programs were evaluated by examining pre-post treatment change against the '3-predictor model' – a model that predicts the likelihood of reoffending based on the coping skills, long term goals and release plans of the offender.³⁸ Findings were based on the outcomes for 21 Indigenous offenders who participated in the New Horizons and Back on Track programs between 2005 and 2008.³⁹

There was a statistically significant improvement across all three domains:

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Parliament of Australia, "Doing Time - Time For Doing: Indigenous youth in the criminal justice system" (2011) 59-61

³⁷ Queensland Corrective Services. *Intervention Programs Booklet*

http://www.correctiveservices.qld.gov.au/About_Us/Booklets/Intervention%20Programs%20PRINT.pdf

³⁸ Smallbone, S & McHugh, M 2010. *Outcomes of Queensland Corrective Services Sexual Offender Treatment Programs: Final Report* School of Criminology and Criminal Justice Griffith University

http://www.correctiveservices.qld.gov.au/Publications/Corporate_Publications/Reviews_and_Reports/Final%20Report_%20Outcomes%20of%20QCS%20Sexual%20Off%20Treatment%20Program.pdf

³⁹ Ibid.

- *Coping skills*: Pre-treatment mean suggested frequent major problems with coping skills. Although this improved, on average offenders were still assessed as exhibiting frequent moderate problems with coping skills at post-intervention.⁴⁰
- *Long-term goals and release plans*: Prior to treatment, Indigenous offenders were assessed as having unrealistic release plans, with many problems and at least one long-term goal considered to be unobtainable.⁴¹ Following treatment, New Horizons and Back on Track program participants were assessed as having good release plans and obtainable long-term goals, with comparatively few problems associated with each.⁴²

In terms of clinically significant improvement, 14 per cent met criteria for coping skills, 35 per cent for long-term plans, and 24 per cent for release plans.⁴³

3.3 The Violent Offenders Therapeutic Program

Background

The Violent Offender Treatment Program (VOTP) was developed in 2003 replacing an earlier version called the Violence Prevention Program (VPP).⁴⁴ The VOTP is a residential therapy programme for men with a history of serious violent behaviour and is located at Parklea Correctional Centre. Violent offenders assessed as being of higher risk of recidivism and who have a prior history of committing one or more violent offences are prioritised into the VOTP.

Offenders in the programme are accommodated in a 64-bed unit located within the Centre. The setting is designed to enable offenders to explore and address their offending behaviour within a therapeutic community environment. A multi-disciplinary team consisting of psychologists, custodial staff and other offender services and programme staff deliver the programme.

Outcomes

One study has compared recidivism and institutional misconduct rates for treated versus untreated violent offenders who participated in the VPP.⁴⁵ The study found that treated offenders had an overall 17 per cent lower violence reconviction rate with an average 4-year follow up period – although these results did not meet statistical significance.⁴⁶ This study also demonstrated that violent offenders who participated in the VPP had a lower rate of violent misconducts whilst remaining in prison than did non-participants.⁴⁷

Preliminary examinations of the effectiveness of the VOTP have also been conducted by looking at pre- to post treatment changes. These studies have all consistently demonstrated that treatment goals have been met. VOTP participants have been reported as having reductions in their reported levels of anger and anger expression, had a reduced level of criminal thinking, and an increase in their ability to see the

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ware J, et al 2011. 'The Violent Offenders Therapeutic Programme (VOTP) – Rationale and effectiveness'. *Australasian Journal of Correctional Staff Development*, vol. 6, 4 <http://www.bfcsa.nsw.gov.au/journal/ajcsd>

⁴⁵ Roman, I. (2005). *Effects of the Violence Prevention Program on Institutional Behaviour and Recidivism*. Masters Thesis, Unpublished manuscript; cited in Ware J, et al, above n 43.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

perspectives of others.⁴⁸ VOTP participants also had significant improvements in their ability to regulate their anger and in their empathic ability.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Bryan, J., & Day, A 2006. *The Violent Offender Treatment Program (Long Bay Prison, NSW): Preliminary Report and Outcome Data*. NSW, Australia: Department of Corrective Services; cited in Ware J, et al, above n 43.

⁴⁹ Ware J, et al, above n 43.

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http://www.correctiveservices.qld.gov.au/About_Us/Booklets/Intervention%20Programs%20PRINT.pdf
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Stacey K and Associates 2004. *Panyappi Indigenous youth mentoring program: External evaluation report*. Adelaide: South Australia Department of Human Services.
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Ware, J et al 2011. 'The Violent Offenders Therapeutic Programme (VOTP) – Rationale and effectiveness'. *Australasian Journal of Correctional Staff Development*, vol. 6, 4
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