

Evaluation Overview

2012



Evaluation of the Step Out initiative

Red Cross commissioned an independent evaluation of its Step Out: Youth at Risk of Reoffending Mentoring Initiative, funded by the Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department.

The independent evaluation was conducted by Flinders University (South Australia) in the period February 2011–August 2012.

Step Out - Youth at Risk of Reoffending Mentoring Initiative (SOMI) ran from February 2011 to May 2012.

Step Out supported 20 young people leaving juvenile detention, or young people who have been in contact with the juvenile justice system. The initiative assisted young people to develop plans for their lives and to access a range of services so they have the ability to 'step out' of reoffending and integrate back into their community. The young people worked with dedicated mentors to help them achieve their goals.

In February 2011 Red Cross commissioned an independent evaluation to examine the effectiveness of the Step Out initiative in supporting participants to identify their personal goals, reconnect with their communities and minimise their future risk of reoffending.

Key Points

An independent evaluation found that Step Out is a **unique and effective program** which should be **extended to more young people leaving juvenile justice facilities**. The study shows that –

- The program eased and improved participants' positive integration back into mainstream society
- Mentoring had a substantive impact on young people's decision-making and capacity to plan for their futures
- The SOMI assisted some participants to meet their accommodation, job training and/or employment needs
- Young people identified having someone in their life they could rely upon and trust as the single most important benefit of SOMI
- Young people's overall experience was positive.

Background

Step Out - Youth at Risk of Reoffending Mentoring Initiative (the SOMI) commenced in December 2010 and concluded on 30 June 2012.

The SOMI involved the pairing of six paid mentors (and, where possible, volunteer mentors) to 20 mentees aged 10 to 25 years (the majority of whom were aged 15 to 18 years), who had served a minimum of one custodial order, and who had attended or had the opportunity to attend an Australian Red Cross Youth, Health and Well Being Program.

A central design aspect of the SOMI was that pairings would commence within custodial institutions and would continue subsequent to release and throughout any and all returns to custody for a defined period. Mentees were selected in accordance with their initial projected release date (mid 2011) which, based on the duration of the SOMI, would permit three to six months of 'custodial' based mentoring and up to 12 months 'community' based mentoring.

The key objectives of the Step Out initiative were:

- To increase levels of social inclusion via mentoring relationships;
- To facilitate the successful integration of young offenders back into their communities;
- To increase the positive life options and overall employability via the attainment of specific educational and training goals; and
- To show measurable and meaningful project outcomes through monitoring and evaluation.

Purpose of the Evaluation

The purpose of the independent evaluation was to undertake a thorough assessment of the program's effectiveness in supporting participants to identify their personal goals, reconnect with their communities and minimise their future risk of reoffending.

The evaluation findings fulfil reporting requirements to the Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department and will underpin service development, future funding submissions, social policy positions and advocacy initiatives related to young people in contact with the juvenile justice system.

Methodology

The evaluation data was collected through summaries of mentees' Personal Development Guides (n=19); Entry Surveys (Mentor 100% response rate and Mentee 95% response rate); Mid-Point Surveys (Mentor 100% response rate and Mentee 83% response rate); Exit Surveys (Mentor 80% response rate and Mentee 93%

response rate); participant interviews (Mentor n=5 and Mentee n=6), as well as field notes made by the evaluator.

The most reliable data emerged from participants (four mentors and six mentees) who populated all surveys and who participated in an interview.

Key Findings

The average duration of a mentoring relationship was 10.5 months. This is marginally less time than anticipated but nonetheless provides a suitable foundation from which to examine the effectiveness of the SOMI.

The evaluation found that –

- The clear majority of mentees believed their journey toward integration into mainstream society had been made easier, better, or more likely, on account of their participation in the SOMI
- Mentees' single most important stated benefit was having someone in their life they could rely upon and trust



- Mentoring had a substantive impact in the areas of mentee decision making and capacity to plan for pro-social futures
- Half of mentees returning the Exit Survey reported their accommodation needs as having been either partly or fully met due to participation in the SOMI
- More than half of mentees returning the Exit Survey reported that their job training/employment needs had at least been partly met due to participation in the SOMI
- Consistency and reliability of contact with their mentor was nominated by most mentees as key to their progress under the SOMI
- Excepting one mentee who returned an “Undecided” response, all mentees rated their overall experience of the SOMI as either “positive” or “very positive”

- The majority of mentors noted the vital role played by volunteer mentors in helping them carry out their work
- Mentors very likely underestimated the nature and extent of their positive impact on mentees’ lives.

Recommendations

On the basis of the findings, the evaluator suggested the SOMI be extended to more young people involved in the custodial system, and that mentoring hours be increased to 8 hours per week.

Furthermore, the role of the mentor should be expanded to include the mentee’s family, and to engagement with external departments and agencies which have control over the care and/or custody of the young person.

Ongoing, strong relationships with external agencies and dedicated office space for mentors were also recommended.

Acknowledgments

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The evaluation was led by Professor Mark Halsey and coordinated by Stella Koukouvatakis (Project Coordinator - Step Out, Red Cross). The study was supported by Panayiota Romios (National Research Coordinator, Red Cross) and the Evaluation Reference Group.

More Information

For further information about the evaluation, please contact Red Cross’ Research Unit at research@redcross.org.au

RED CROSS WORKS WITH OFFENDERS AND THEIR FAMILIES

Red Cross is committed to an inclusive society where all people are valued, their differences are respected and their basic needs are met. We work to overcome social exclusion by providing bridges for people back into the community.

Offenders and their families are some of the most vulnerable and socially excluded people in Australia. Research highlights that offenders are often impacted by broader patterns of exclusion and disadvantage, with histories of abuse, neglect, inadequate education, unemployment, mental health, drug and alcohol issues, homelessness and intellectual disability. Offenders' families suffer stress from stigma, social isolation, financial difficulties and changes in living arrangements as well as physical and mental health problems.



Australian Red Cross is working to improve the lives of offenders and their families and, through this work, contribute to a stronger, safer and more resilient society. More information about Red Cross' work with offenders and their families is available at <http://www.redcross.org.au/offenders-and-their-families.aspx>