



Centre for Forensic
Behavioural Science

Summary of Rolling Evaluation Report Year 1 Evaluation, December 2019

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Embedded Youth Outreach Program
Evaluation

Prepared for Victoria Police

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This report was prepared under contract to Victoria Police.
The views of the authors do not necessarily represent the
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V I C T O R I A P O L I C E

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Prepared for Victoria Police by the Centre for Forensic Behavioural Science,
Swinburne University of Technology, Melbourne Australia.

For all matters relating to this report please contact:

Centre for Forensic Behavioural Science
Level 1, 582 Heidelberg Road, Alphington, Victoria 3078
+61 3 9214 3887
info-cfbs@swin.edu.au

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of country throughout Australia and recognise their continuing connection to land, waters and culture. We pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging.

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Introduction

Victoria Police is piloting a new approach for high risk young people, called the Embedded Youth Outreach Project (EYOP). The aim of this new approach is to enhance Victoria Police's ability to support the complex needs of young people at high risk of antisocial or criminal behaviour, and/or victimisation. The EYOP will allow for targeted, timely and supported pathways for young people from police contact to engagement with service providers who can assist in addressing the underlying welfare needs and criminogenic factors that drive contact with police.

The pilot is delivered in partnership with a youth support specialist Youth Support and Advocacy Service (YSAS) and pairs a police officer with a youth worker to provide an after-hours secondary response to young people coming into contact with police. This provides a unique opportunity to identify at-risk youth, target the needs of young people, and intervene to interrupt the offending pathway. There are also opportunities to help protect victims and reduce the likelihood of future victimisation.

This approach is being piloted within two police divisions: North West Metro Division 2 (ND2) and Southern Metro Division 3 (SD3).

The Centre for Forensic Behavioural Science (CFBS) at Swinburne University has been engaged to evaluate the EYOP initiative. As part of that process an evaluation framework has been developed to monitor the program's effectiveness and provide evidence-based service improvements.

Methodology

The EYOP evaluation involved a process and preliminary outcome evaluation for the period 1 September 2018 to 31 August 2019. This evaluation utilised quantitative and qualitative methods to assess if the program was implemented as intended and meeting the EYOP objectives. The evaluation included the following elements:



Interviews and focus groups with police and youth workers.

In total 57 EYOP staff (youth workers, frontline police members, shift supervisors, program managers, research and evaluation advisors, and operational commanders)



Unique records (data) for a total of 784 EYOP clients including:

- Police held shift returns
- YSAS held assessment and follow-up data
- Participant Law Enforcement Assistance Program (LEAP) data



Case studies from EYOP engagements

Literature Review

The literature highlighted the importance of adhering to Risk, Need, and Responsivity principles across all intervention and diversion approaches to offending in youth. At the policing level, few evaluations exist of primary and early intervention programs; the majority of the literature concerns secondary intervention initiatives. For frontline police, secondary intervention usually involves the diversion of youth to appropriate services. For collaborative responses to youth offending, secondary intervention programs most frequently take the form of multidisciplinary teams who case-manage young offenders.

According to the literature review of the available evidence base, it is possible to combine frontline police management of youth with the multidisciplinary team approach, as demonstrated by the Juvenile Justice Mobile Response Team (JJMRT) model, based in Albany County, New York.

In terms of factors that impede program effectiveness, some evaluations have suggested that a conflict between police-led diversion and broader policy goals of “bringing offenders to justice” can hamper the success of early diversion programs. Similarly, differing philosophies, aims and objectives have been found to undermine multidisciplinary teams.

Key findings

Key Messages

- Initial results from the EYOP pilot are positive and affirm that the EYOP is operating as an after-hours response model using brief intervention and short-term support .
- EYOP is engaging with a complex group of young people with high levels of criminogenic need that warrant intervention to prevent entry to, or further involvement with, the criminal justice system.
- EYOP is unique in being able to engage youth who wouldn't normally self-refer or attend an office-based service and a supported engagement service enables EYOP clients to successfully engage with their agency referrals immediately following police contact.
- The EYOP has practitioner endorsement with EYOP operating staff reporting that the program has significant benefits for the young people they work with.

Key Elements of success

Collaborative mobile response model

Information drawn from the focus groups and EYOP case studies revealed a positive perception of the collaborative inter-disciplinary approach adopted by EYOP. The following key themes were evident:

- Police and YSAS workers agreed that the inclusion of the other strengthened the EYOP team and opened new opportunities in their work with young people.
- The relationship between the two professionals in the EYOP team was seen as crucial, and the strength of the relationship was felt to be improved through opportunistic and mutual learning.

- The ability of the EYOP team to effectively communicate with hard to engage youth and create the opportunity for young people to experience a helpful police response was a common theme in the case studies; particularly with respect to Aboriginal young people and youth from ethnic minority groups.

Capacity Building and Skill Transition

- There was a consensus from the EYOP youth workers that capacity building had occurred as a result of interactions and modelling on EYOP shifts, and a belief that time spent together is useful for learning from each other. Youth workers identified an increase in knowledge, or more conscious awareness, of the impacts of criminal behaviour and

pressures of policing, whereas police members noted the effectiveness of youth workers' philosophy and approach in de-escalating and engaging young people. Police did appropriately assert the need to maintain their discipline expertise and a unique role within the EYOP team.

- Police members valued EYOP youth workers' knowledge, engagement and communication skills. Youth workers identified that the authority provided by police members being present created opportunities to engage with youth who would normally avoid supports.
- Youth workers highlighted the value of the increased access to information and places they achieved from working closely with police. The increased access to information was regarded as helpful for both referrals and therapeutic work.

- The overall feedback about EYOP from operational staff was positive and both groups of professionals agreed that the inclusion of the other strengthened the EYOP team and opened new opportunities in their work with young people. One of the interviewed youth workers said -

'[We're like] steel on steel, you become sharper in the work you do... working together, we both become better... The uniform, it can be a barrier for them... us being there can help that... experience the member as a person...they see the member in a new light'.

EYOP 'Captures' Young People in Real Time

International evaluations have shown the effectiveness of multidisciplinary frontline police partnerships aimed at engaging vulnerable youth and linking them more effectively with intervention services which can lead to a reduction in recidivism. Factors attributed to the effectiveness of frontline police partnerships engaging with at risk youth include:

- engagement where a young person feels safe or comfortable;
- assertive outreach immediately after police contact when issues are still 'live'; and
- capitalising on 'in the moment' motivation and the setting of meaningful goals.

Both groups of professionals noted that EYOP allows young people to be 'captured' at the time when they were feeling most vulnerable at the time of the event or crisis, rather than requiring the young person to reach out at a later point in time.

Importance of Engagement with a Supported Service

- Almost half of all young people engaged by EYOP received a referral to at least one support service. The types of services included: Assertive Case Management, Housing, Education, Employment, Family Intervention, Drug and/or Alcohol, Mental Health, Sexual Assault Service, Victims of Crime Service, GP, Problem Behaviour, Justice Service, and Legal.
- The other half were assessed as 'not required'. Of the young people who received a referral, 65% attended at least one session or appointment with at least one support service for which they received a referral.
- There were some observed differences in referral to different agency types across the two pilot sites. ND2 EYOP clients were overall more likely to receive an agency referral than SD3 EYOP clients. In terms of the type of agencies referred to, youth in ND2 were more likely to be referred to an assertive case management agency or a mental health/primary health agency than youth in SD3, while youth in SD3 were more likely to be referred to an alcohol or drugs service. The differences in proportion of young people receiving a referral seen across the divisions is predominantly accounted for by available service options in each

Importance of Screening, Assessment and Prioritisation

The high demand for EYOP highlighted the need for a clear triage process, as staff were not clear as to which young people to prioritise on EYOP shifts. The demand for EYOP was greater than initially anticipated, leading to concerns around staffing levels and workload.

- The available evidence base highlights the need to embed Risk Need and Responsivity principles and assessments into diversionary and intervention programs for young offenders. In line with this, the initial evaluation findings indicated that EYOP involved youth in both divisions were generally being referred to agencies based on a combination of, 1) the young person's level of criminogenic risk and need, and 2) their level of need for mental health and social support services. This indicates that EYOP operational members, whether consciously or not, are selecting and supporting a young person's engagement based on risk, need and responsivity (RNR) principles.
- To support the ongoing provision of RNR aligned support, and to enhance the efficacy of EYOP moving forward, Victoria Police and YSAS are currently working on clarifying the roles in the EYOP team, and refining the triage process for EYOP clients, so that EYOP resources can be targeted at young people where the greatest impact can be achieved.

Future Directions

In order to enhance the sustainability and effectiveness of EYOP the evaluation has identified the need to address three primary issues:

1. Further refine criteria for prioritisation of EYOP clients to maximise benefit of the EYOP unit as a prevention and early intervention program.
2. Continue to test and refine EYOP client triaging framework
3. Define pathways for service delivery that flow from the triaging process with a focus on targeting resources to those where the greatest impact can be reached.