Centre for Forensic Behavioural Science

Executive Summary

24th September 2020

Embedded Youth Outreach Program Evaluation

Prepared for Victoria Police

SWINBURNE UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY

This report was prepared under contract to Victoria Police. The views of the authors do not necessarily represent the views of Victoria Police or the Victorian Government.

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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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Acknowledgment

The evaluation of the Embedded Youth Outreach Project (EYOP) was commissioned and funded by the Victoria Police. The evaluation development and implementation was overseen by the EYOP Project Management Team, the Steering Committee, comprising representatives from Victoria Police including Victim Advisory Unit, and Enterprise Program Management, Youth Support and Advocacy Service. The Centre for Forensic Behavioural Science (CFBS) would like to acknowledge the support of this group in developing the evaluation framework, facilitating access to data and interview participants, and providing feedback on research outputs. The evaluation would not have been possible without the willing participation of government and community stakeholders who participated in interviews and provided data that formed the basis of the evaluation.

Acronyms	
CFBS	Centre for Forensic Behavioural Science
EYOP	Embedded Youth Outreach Project
YSAS	Youth Support and Advocacy Service
ND2	North West Metro Division 2 (Victoria Police division)
SD3	Southern Metro Division 3 (Victoria police division)
ND3	North West Metro Division 3 (Victoria police division)
LEAP	Law Enforcement Assistance Program
WoVG-YEP	Whole of Victorian Government Youth Engagement Package
YLS/CMI	Youth Level of Service/Case Management Inventory
EoS	Episodes of Service
YOT	Youth On Track
RNR	Risk Needs Responsivity
ACM	Assertive case management
AOD	Alcohol or drugs
YP	Young person
YW	Youth worker
VP	Victoria police

Terminology	
Cohort	A group of individuals who share a common characteristic (e.g., the evaluation cohort is the group who received the EYOP intervention, and the control cohort is the group who did not receive the intervention).
Time at risk	The time between first EYOP/Police contact and the end of the follow-up period during which the young person was at risk of offending.
Outcome variables	The key variables that are observed and measured.
N and *n*	The number of individuals or cases in a sample or subsample.
Mean (*M*)	The mathematical average of a set of values.
Median (*Mdn*)	The value at the midpoint of a range of values when ordered from lowest to highest.
Variability	How spread-out a set of values in a data set are. That is, how much the values differ from each other.
Skewed distribution	When data is not evenly distributed and the values are clustered at one end of the data set.
Standard deviation (*SD*)	A measure of how dispersed a range of values are around the mean.
Interquartile range (*IQR*)	The middle 50% of a range of values when ordered from lowest to highest.
95% Confidence Interval	A range of values that you can be 95% certain contains the true mean of a population or group.
Statistical power	The probability of finding an effect if there is an effect to be found.
Significance (*p*)	How likely it is that a result is due to chance. E.g., '$p < .05$' indicates that there is less than a 5% chance that the result occurred at random.
Non-parametric tests	Methods of analysis that are used when data does not have a normal distribution.
Chi-square tests (χ^2)	A test that evaluates if two or more categorical variables are associated in any way.
t-test (*t*)	A statistical test that assesses whether the mean values of two groups are significantly different.
Mann-Whitney U test (*U*)	A nonparametric test used to compare differences between two independent groups.
Wilcoxn Signed rank test	A non parametric test used to compare the differences between two sets of observations taken from the same sample
Kruskal Wallis rank test	A nonparametric test used to compare differences between three or more independent groups.
Survival analysis	A method of investigating the time it takes for an event to occur.
Effect size (*r*)	The size/magnitute of the difference between two groups or variables. In general, 0.1 = small, 0.3 = medium, 0.5 = large.

Context

In 2018 Victoria Police piloted a new approach for high risk young people, called the Embedded Youth Outreach Project (EYOP). The aim of this new approach was 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 pilot is ongoing and allows 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 project pairs a police officer with a Youth Support and Advocacy Service (YSAS) youth worker (the EYOP team) to provide an after-hours secondary response to young people coming into contact with police. The EYOP team responds to police interactions with young people, engaging with young people in the field or at a police station to assess their needs and provide initial support, assessment and referral. This approach was piloted within two police divisions: North West Metro Division 2 (ND2) and Southern Metro Division 3 (SD3).

In conjunction with the roll-out of the EYOP, the Centre for Forensic Behavioural Science at Swinburne University of Technology (CFBS) was contracted to develop an evaluation framework and implementation to allow for ongoing monitoring of program efficacy and allow for ongoing service improvement.

Operationalisation of the EYOP objectives statement

"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. This youth outreach service will allow for targeted, timely and supported pathways for young people from police contact to engagement with service providers who can address the underlying criminogenic factors that drive contact with police."

Identification of a young person's criminogenic needs and supported referral to matched service provider(s) to address those needs;

Initial engagement of high-risk young people to referred service provider(s);

Development of a working alliances between EYOP team members, referral services, and young people in the catchment region;

Decrease in the number, frequency, and severity of youth offences by an individual following EYOP involvement; and

Decrease in police contacts, missing person incidents, and victimisation following EYOP involvement.

Key conclusions

The EYOP is an innovative and bold program designed to meet the needs of young people with whom the police come into contact. Although the program was understandably complex to roll out and evaluate, a number of promising findings emerged from the EYOP pilot period.

- Youth workers identify the criminogenic needs, vulnerability factors, and protective factors of all young people who have contact with EYOP.
- Most young people who have been referred to support services attend at least one appointment and all professionals interviewed as part of the evaluation indicate that having the EYOP team present and able to engage youth immediately is valuable and distinguishes EYOP from other initiatives.
- Feedback from youth workers and police suggests strong working alliances have been developed and there has been capacity building on both sides. Also, young people who provided feedback spoke positively about the relationships they have established with their youth workers and some referral services.
- Overall, a positive treatment effect was found for EYOP clients, compared to a matched control group, across the period of EYOP intervention and following participation for a number of offence categories.
- The benefits of the EYOP program outweigh the costs and provides value for money.

It was not possible to rigorously assess some program objectives due to the lack of EYOP staff capacity to systematically record detailed data.

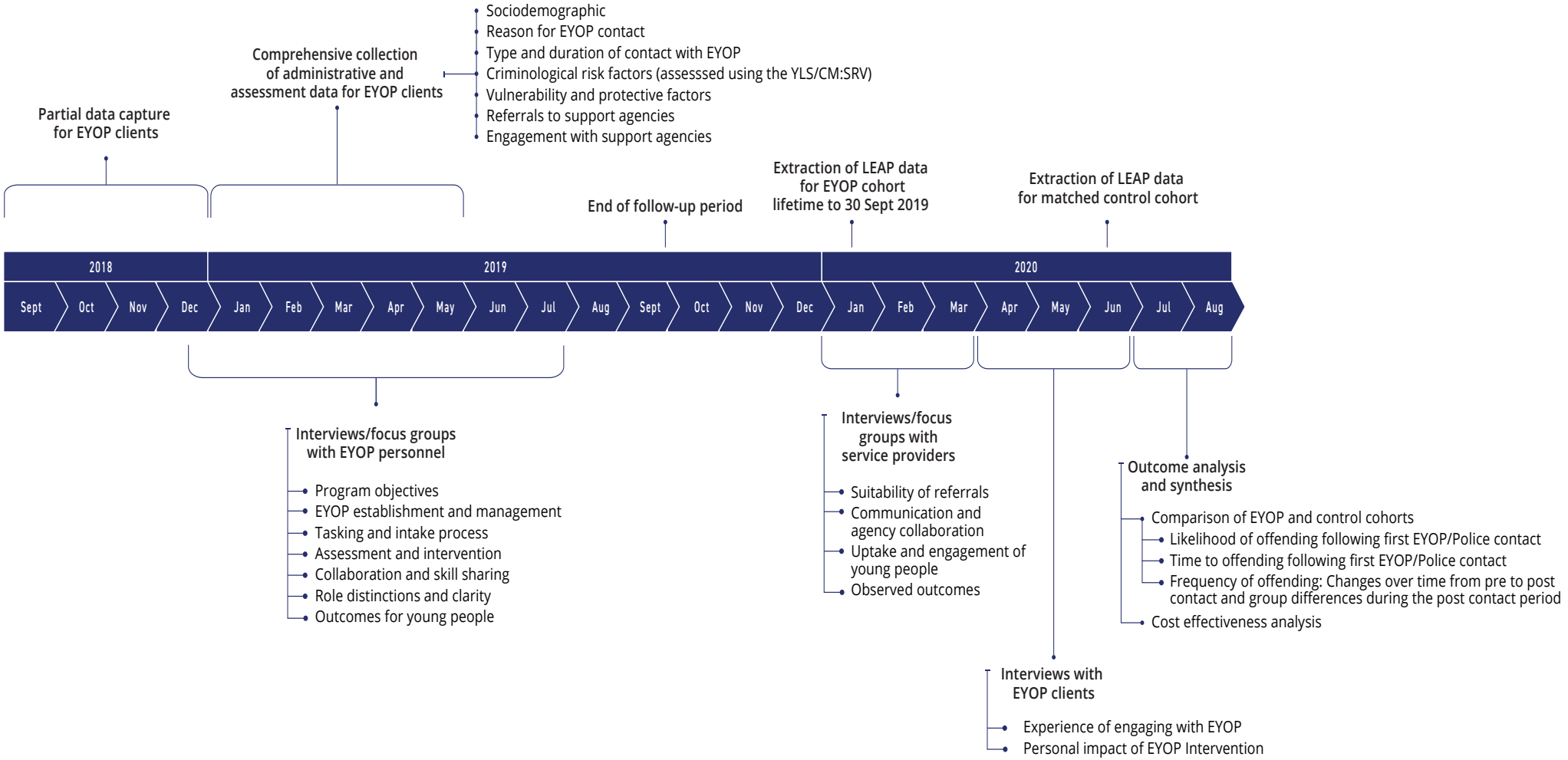
- There was a lack of data to fully investigate the matching of support service referral to criminogenic and other needs
- There was no data available to assess the impact of the program on non-offending outcomes such as mental health service contacts.

Consultation with support services indicated that the warm referral component of the EYOP framework was not always occurring consistently and that in some cases young people were being referred to services before they were ready to engage.

- Consideration should be given to the adjustment of the EYOP approach towards engaging EYOP youth with assertive case management services which increase readiness for engagement with other services.
- The warm referral aspect of model needs to be examined to determine whether it should still occur and, if so, how the benefits could be maximised.

Approach to the evaluation

The evaluation involved process and outcome components. Qualitative and quantitative methods were utilised to assess if the program was implemented as intended and was meeting the stated program objectives.



YLS/CMI:SRV = Youth Level of Service / Case Management Inventory Screening Research Version

Key findings

Literature review of the available evidence base

The review 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. 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.

To be effective, all partners involved in collaborative projects must have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities and have common goals. Overall, the literature suggests that police-led diversion programs are moderately effective in reducing rates of recidivism, and multidisciplinary work is central to ensuring young offenders receive the services they require.

Development and implementation

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. 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.

... I know what it is to walk in the police's shoes now, 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 (Youth Worker [YW])

... the difference between the two roles helps both roles do more, opens opportunities... they have a way to get the kids to talk... you can do something for them then. (Victoria Police member [VP])

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. 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.

There were some limits to the collaborative nature of the EYOP team, with police members viewing their role more as facilitating the youth worker's role, rather than as part of the team making decisions regarding prevention and early intervention. The degree of ownership for outcomes and collaboration varied based on discipline, with a range of ultimate goals of the EYOP articulated.

They have a good history of the young person [and family], intel… it's nice to know where you could put your foot in it before you do so!… also good for referring and doing therapeutic work, very helpful, usually only get what they tell us. (YW)

Youth workers give us access and ability to engage with young people who would normally be telling us to nick off… the passion and empathy they bring to the young people, acceptance… opportunity for the young person to experience a [police] member who's there to help them…(VP)

We are the driver, security…supporting them in the work they do [engaging with young people]…we can do checks to find out what we're walking in to. We can make it safe. (VP)

After-hours, in the field, support and referral service

The time of day the EYOP shift has contact with young people ranged from 15:00 to 2:00, with two thirds of contacts occurring between 16:30 to 21:30 in ND2 and 19:00 to 23:00 in SD3. However, police raised some concern that most youth offending occurs between 23:00 and 2:00. Accordingly, there was some tension evident regarding the most appropriate time for EYOP shifts to occur, highlighting discrepant views regarding the scope and role of EYOP as a prevention and early-intervention program.

The average duration of the EYOP team's initial response with a young person differed by division, with ND2 engaging for longer durations compared to SD3. Nevertheless, in both divisions no more than 7% of young people were engaged for longer than 2-hours on initial contact.

The majority of young people received one episode of service from the EYOP (78%). Within each episode of service, the majority of EYOP clients (73%) were engaged by the EYOP team for a single session only and provided with a brief intervention and/or referral to support services.

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.

> *Sometimes we show a different side of the young person that police don't normally see…seem to soften and respond to them differently, for example, young person said they're ashamed of what they did – and police had never heard that before, it's humanising them [young person]…we actually see the growth in police workers because we see same ones…you can definitely see the growth, because of the team. (YW)*

> *I've been really proud of the police, the effort, and their roles, even if they weren't into it at the beginning. Have really embraced it, respect for doing it, something very different for them. So much capacity building, which is really underestimated… nothing has been an issue, they're good to us, go above and beyond…and they take on things, if it work they use it again…that role modelling thing, see us do it, then you see them do it next time and it works!.. even advocacy is being picked up by police at times. (YW)*

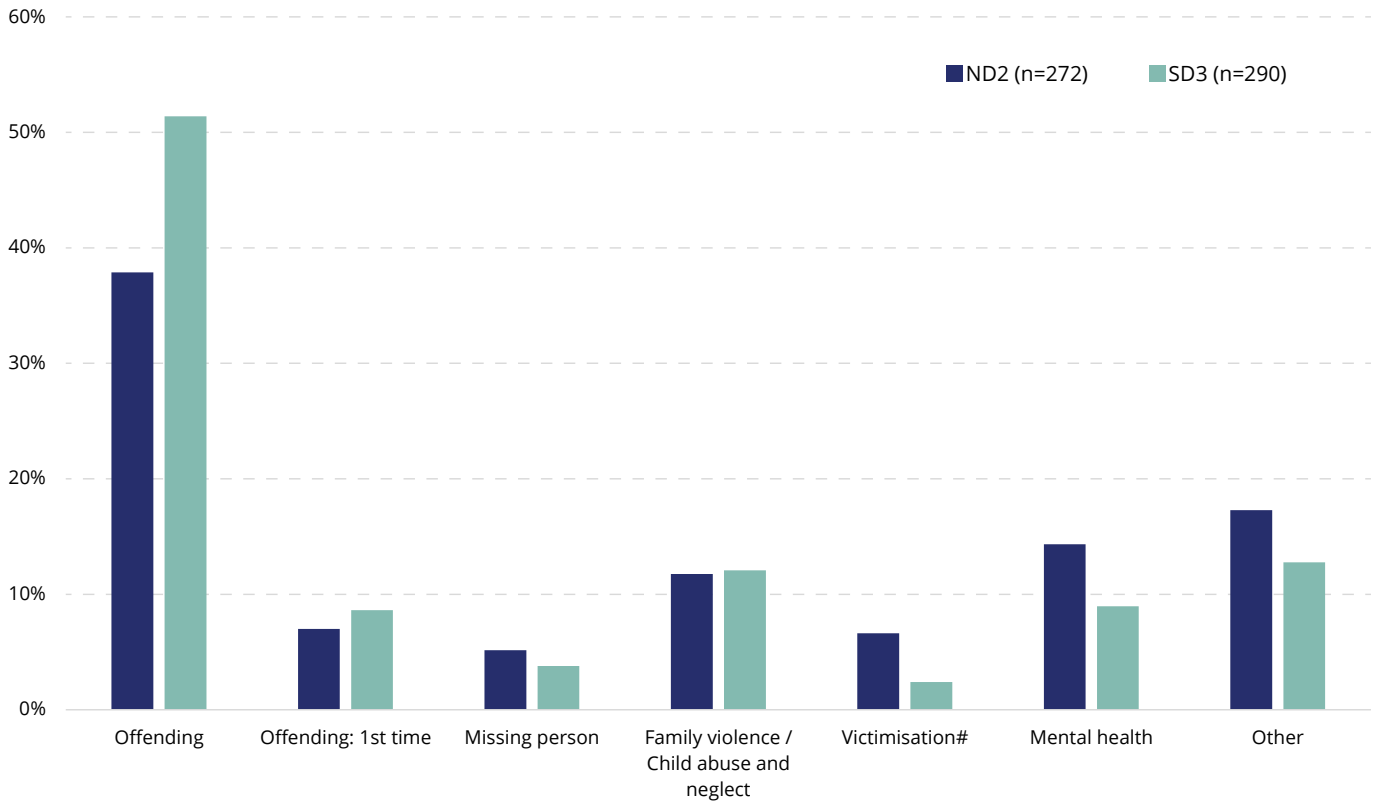
Police did appropriately assert the need to maintain their discipline expertise and a unique role within the EYOP team.

> *Good to see how they approach and speak to youths. We can't have that in all situations, but their way of thinking does help us, for example, different approaches can help with some kids…the fact that they don't have that 'copperish' approach, can engage more…but depends what the situation is, some of the kids can do full on stuff, need to be watching for that…and the victims have rights as well. (VP)*

Tasking and engagement

Reason for contact with young people

Young people in SD3 were more likely to be engaged by EYOP due to offending when compared to ND2. However The EYOP operating model does not intend to exclusively target young people who have engaged in criminal behaviour, with the primary prevention and early intervention focuses of the model not requiring a young person to have had contact with police due to alleged offending. The common theme from youth workers was that the EYOP model afforded an opportunity to develop a therapeutic relationship with a young person, whether offending or not. Their emphasis was on establishing a rapport with the young person, breaking down barriers, and supporting the young person's access to services

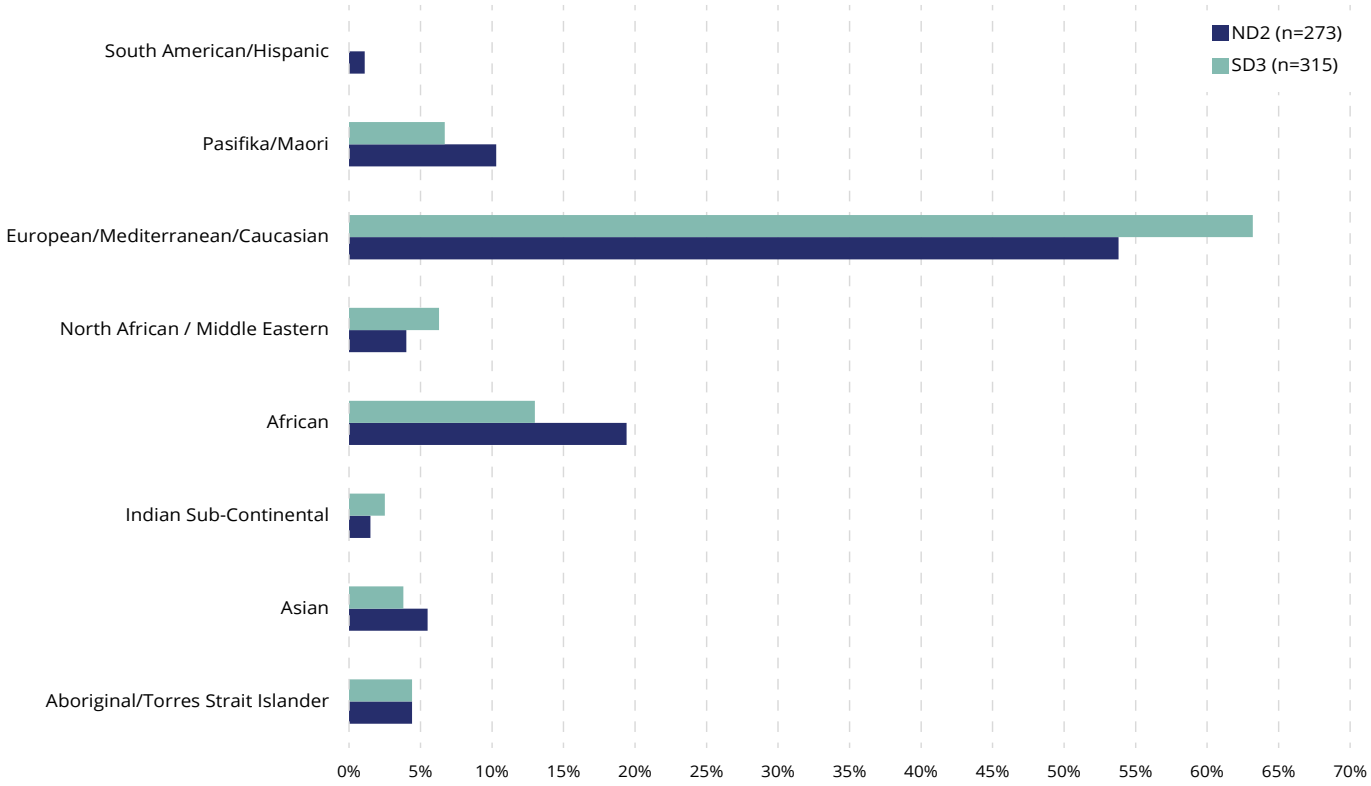


outside family

EYOP client characteristics

Two thirds of young people engaged by EYOP during the evaluation period were aged between 14 and 20 years old. EYOP clients in SD3 represented a slightly older group being approximately 10-months older on average and the age distribution more suggestive of a young adult cohort.

Just under two thirds of EYOP clients were male, and the majority were Caucasian. There was a slightly higher proportion of youth from an African or Pasifika cultural background engaged by ND2 compared to SD3.



EYOP eligibility and workload

A consistent theme that emerged from youth worker and police feedback was concerns around the staffing levels and workload, specifically the limited number of full-time youth workers to cover all EYOP shifts and service follow-up for young people. Youth workers described the work as "physically draining" and "relentless", due to limited resourcing making rostering accounting for circadian rhythms difficult, and the volume of young people needing daytime follow-up outside of EYOP shifts.[1]

If you've got hundreds of young people on the books, making follow up, making referrals – it's a constant flow – it's a lot… You're constantly accumulating, the follow up is massive… impossible to keep on top of. (YW)

The volume of eligible young people for EYOP is acknowledged to be high, however two predominant themes emerged that exacerbated staff feeling overwhelmed: 1) lack of clarity and criteria for triaging young people in contact with police for EYOP involvement; 2) lack of clarity that the EYOP is a crisis assessment, triage, and referral service, as opposed to traditional youth work or case management.

We could double or even triple the work for the youth workers and [there would] still be plenty more work…There are a lot of missed opportunities, a lot of them slip through the cracks….you're only hitting 15-20% of what's out there…can't follow up missed opportunities… you have a timeframe of getting the EYOP worker to the scene…just can't make it in time, sometimes. (VP)

Of note there were themes from police members regarding triaging that align with the evidence base, that is, targeting young people with lower levels of antisocial attitudes and younger youth for whom offending behaviour is not as entrenched.

I think the trick is getting a hold of those who are new to the system, have that early intervention, that does seem to work better… Better response from those than recidivists. They don't want the intervention, or they agree for the sake of it. (VP)

The need for refinement of tasking criteria, triaging processes, and EYOP service scope was also highlighted through operational staff members' ambivalence about the most appropriate positioning of EYOP within the organisational structure of the two divisions. There were seen to be strengths and weaknesses of both EYOP being housed within youth tasking programs and frontline response unit.

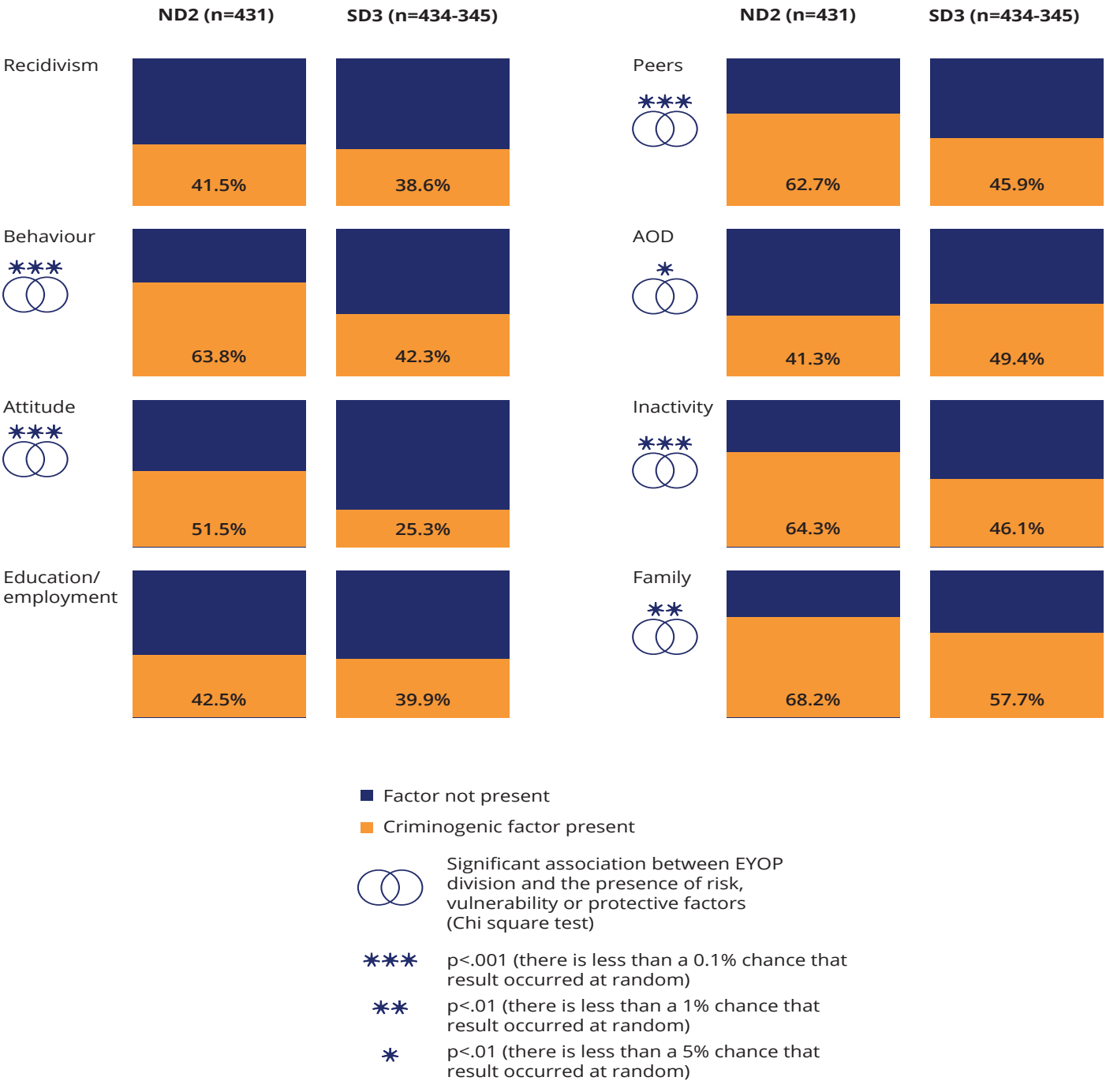
There is a fundamental difference between frontline and youth tasking teams ……But doesn't mean that [frontline response] members aren't caring, and response and reaction to EYOP has been really positive, just a different focus. (YW)

[1]Since the collection of this data the EYOP program has increased funded hours for EYOP youth workers

Screening and client needs

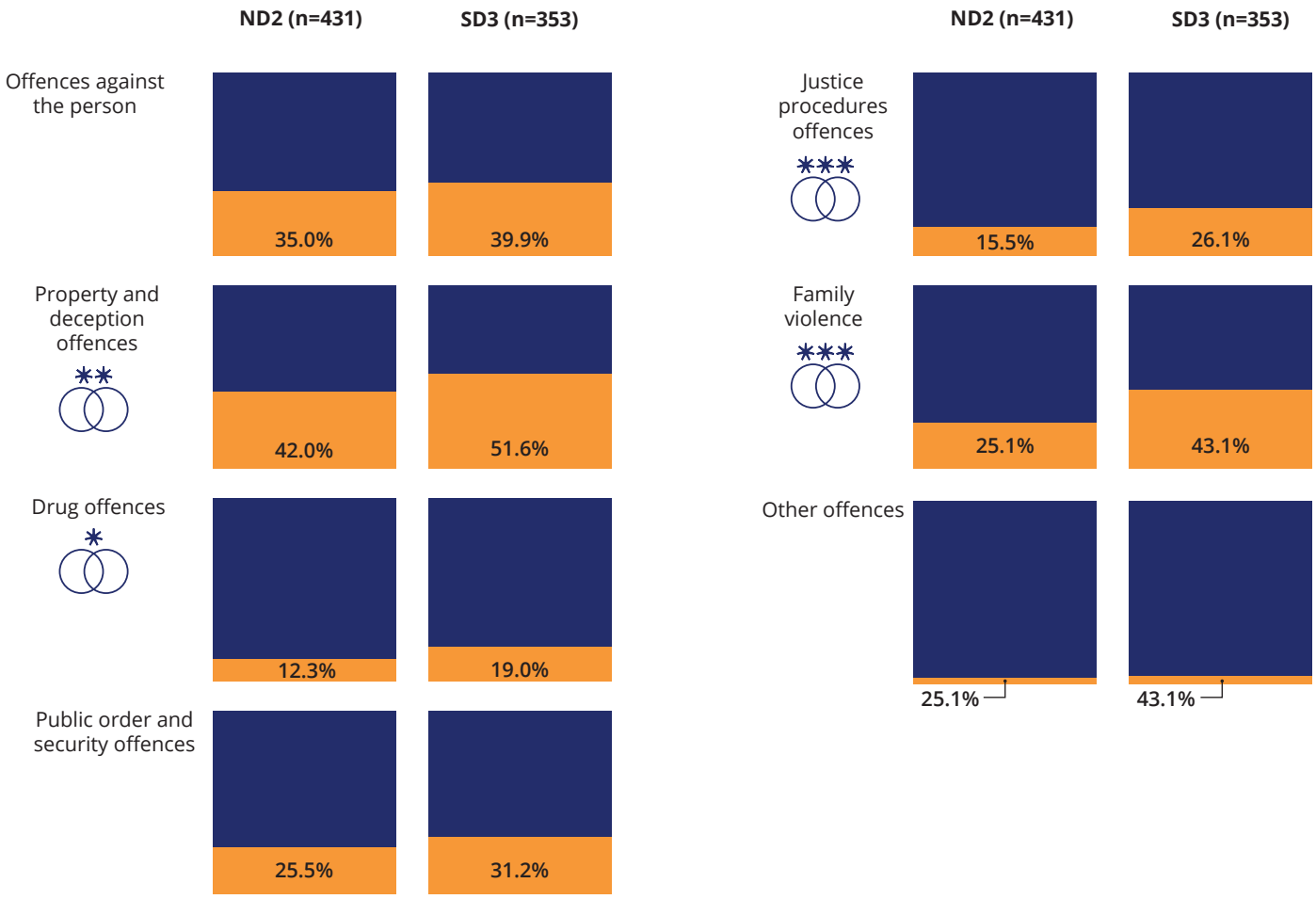
Young people engaged with EYOP typically experienced complex issues related to offending and vulnerability, with more than two-thirds (n = 529) of EYOP clients experiencing at least three issues associated with an area of criminogenic need, and on average two issues that increase their vulnerability to harm. ND2 EYOP clients had higher levels of criminogenic need and unreported interpersonal victimisation and mental distress, but a less extensive criminal history and official history of interpersonal victimisation than SD3 EYOP clients.

Criminogenic needs in EYOP clients



The sample of EYOP clients had a history of a range of offences, though the majority involved offences against the person and/or property and deception offences.

Offence history in EYOP clients

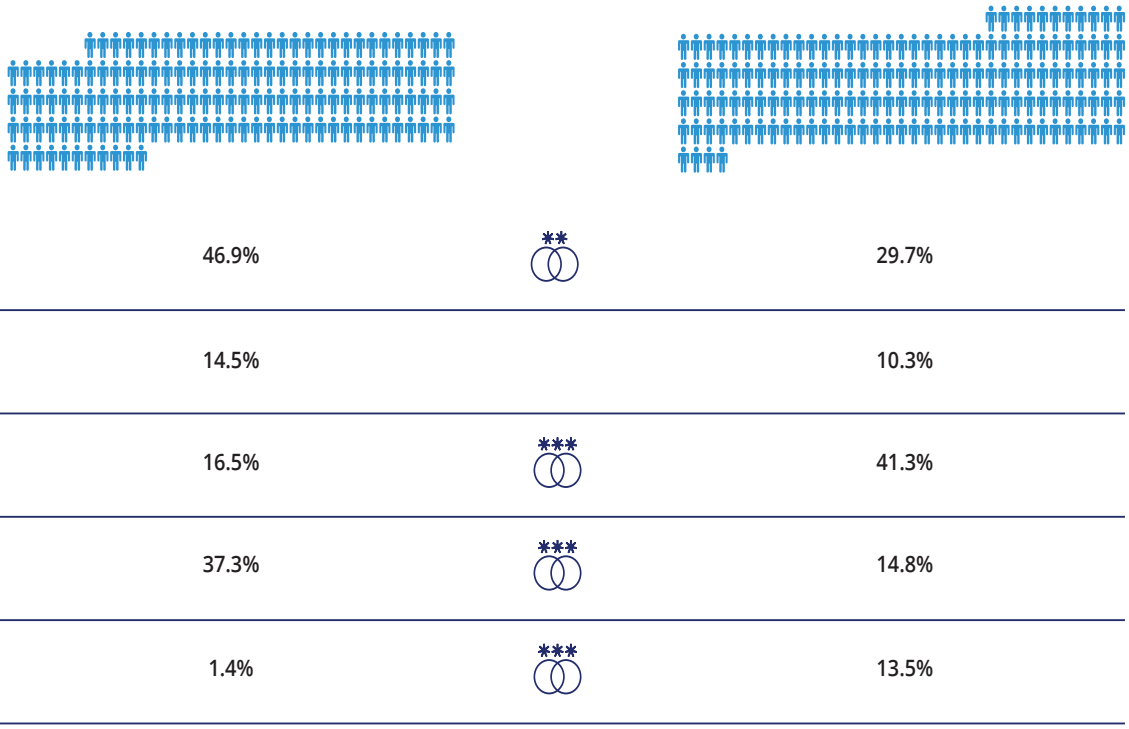


Brief solution focused intervention and supported service referrals

Almost half of all young people engaged by EYOP received a supported referral to at least one support service.

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 division.

Significant association between division and referral to assertive case management, alcohol/drug, mental health/health and justice/legal services



Significant association between EYOP division and the presence of risk, vulnerability or protective factors (Chi square test)

*** p<.001 (there is less than a 0.1% chance that result occurred at random)

** p<.01 (there is less than a 1% chance that result occurred at random)

* p<.01 (there is less than a 5% chance that result occurred at random)

Impact of the EYOP

Access to appropriate and relevant services to address criminogenic needs

Feedback was received from both service providers and young people who had involvement with the EYOP on the value of EYOP, including its role in linking young people access to appropriate and relevant services.

Despite variation in knowledge of the EYOP, there was a general agreement among service providers that EYOP is a valuable service because it advocates for young people "in the moment".

With EYOP there – "can strike while the iron's hot"– immediate support, rather than hearing about it later on or never. [Alcohol or drugs service (AOD)]

Although they [EYOP] are alongside police, they usually end up having those meaningful conversations because they're there at that time [Justice Service]

This advocacy was felt by the young people who were interviewed, who commented that EYOP provided an avenue to be understood and directed towards support services.

[EYOP] helped a lot, beneficial to have someone else other than just the cops, not as intimidating, a third party there (Young person 1 [YP 1])

If [youth worker] wasn't there, things might of turned out really differently … I was in a room, the police wanted to get in, I was scared … didn't want to stay locked in, but there was something I did not want the police to know, I can't remember what it was, I didn't want to tell them … [youth worker] took the initiative and I knew [they] had my back, said stuff, I can't even remember what it was, but knew [they] was there to help me … so, I can't remember what it was, but [they] made sure I felt safe and I could trust [EYOP team], and [youth worker] helped me be able to talk to them [police]. (YP 6)

Service providers also agreed that EYOP is valuable because it advocates for referral services, provides service literacy, and "challenges misconceptions, stigma, assumptions, and misinformation people have about the system".

A lot of young people don't know of services. [Housing]

EYOP does that service literacy – oh that might actually not be that bad – or to understand what the service system is. …Those things are hugely critical, to meet levels of ambivalence. [Justice Service]

It was evident that the young people interviewed valued the information and support that was provided by the EYOP team, in particular, bringing to awareness the support services that could be accessed. The young people also appreciated the assistance provided in navigating the service system and make the first approach to service providers.

…[youth worker] helped connect me to a counsellor … was able to help me find someone to talk to, like a friend to be able to talk about things with … [youth worker] helped me so many times … … I have been through a lot in my life, and I appreciated it a lot, [they] cared about what would happen to me and wanted to help me … I saw [youth worker] in a coffee store later, I said hello, I told [them] that I am studying now … I told [youth worker] that because of how they helped me, cared for me, it really inspired me … and now I am studying social work! (YP 4)

… I had heard of [assertive case management service] through another youth worker, but never went, to dig deeper to contact … [youth worker] made it easier, put in that first step, I went along with it and it was really good in the end …(YP 1)

… I can definitely say, without them I would not be here now … seriously, I would be dead, I was lost, fucked up, did not know what to do, didn't even know that there were people out there who could, would, help … yeah, suicide or OD or some other shit … they [EYOP team] were my first point of contact, they gave a shit, it was like a domino effect, without that initial contact with them and the help they gave, would not of had that next service, and then the next, that helped me get me to where I am now…(YP 5)

A few service providers suggested that EYOP helps with early identification of youth in need of assistance. High risk youth services in particular valued EYOPs role in early intervention, helping to identify young people who would not normally come to their attention. These services also suggested that EYOP helps them reengage with clients, particularly as EYOP "can offer a very neutral youth lens that is not statutory".

Referrals for Family violence are being identified [earlier]– when a sibling (for example) has done something and then EYOP has referred the younger siblings. … [or] they might respond to an incident at a residential unit for one person, but end up chatting and referring more young people from there. [Assertive case management/ alcohol or drugs (ACM/AOD)]

[We] have conversations, and in spirit of early intervention, EYOP has highlighted where there are family members that may need attention or help [Justice Service]

Although the quality of referrals was generally good, services who did not have a strong formal relationship with EYOP, or common meetings, stated that they felt EYOP didn't know what services they offered. As a result, some of the referrals that came through were not appropriate. Comments suggest that as EYOP evolved this issue has lessened, possibly because EYOP workers gained knowledge in terms of the relevant and available services in the area. Interviewees also suggested that at the early stages of the program, EYOP had a strategy of referring to multiple services at the same time in the hope that one would "stick". It is unclear whether this approach has changed.

[Just generally not meeting what we need to provide the case management – e.g. person just needs one small instance of service, which is not what we deliver [Assertive case management (ACM)]

Not appropriate referrals, family may not be suitable for discussion… Not 100% sure they know what we do [Family Intervention]

Initially they were referring to multiple services – now there's more oversight [AOD]

Sometimes we feel like they refer to a whole range of different services hoping that one service will pick up. And we're onto that. [Family Intervention]

Relationship between criminogenic need and agency referrals

Overall, there is no clear relationship between criminological need and agency referral. The lack of an association between criminological need and referrals to any agency type, and the lower referral rates for high needs youth to mental health services, may reflect service readiness and service resistance issues (e.g. lack of consent to a referral). It is not possible to say this with any degree of certainty, however, as there were significant limitations with the data.

No significant association between level of criminogenic needs and EYOP intervention type (referral vs. brief intervention only)

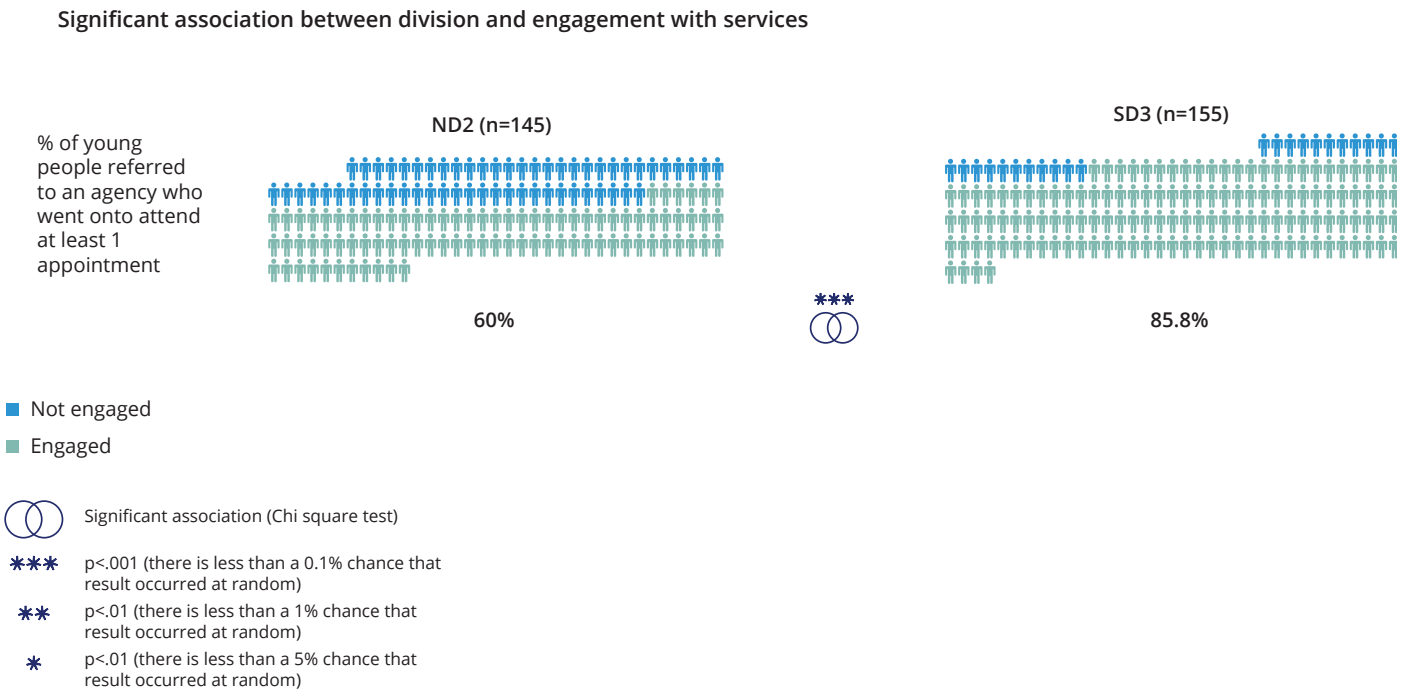
Note: In some cases EYOP clients were referred to more than one agency type

Supported service engagement

An overall engagement rate of 73% (N = 220/300) was observed for EYOP clients immediately following police contact. This is significantly larger than the engagement rate of 43% observed for the Youth on Track (YOT) program in NSW, which is a sample of young people who have already consented to a referral being made to YOT.

A higher proportion of young people engaged in SD3 compared to ND2. However, this difference is predominantly explained by the range of internal YSAS programs that youth workers in SD3 are able to link into for young people.

Percentage of referred young people who engaged with an agency by division



Factors associated with successful engagement

Focus Groups with service providers highlighted a number of factors associated with service engagement (or lack thereof) by young people, including service readiness of young people, good communication between services and the EYOP team, and whether the referral was a “warm” or “cold” referral.

EYOP and YSAS are significantly intertwined, most notably in SD3, to the point that a number of other service providers regarded the two programs as one and the same. As a result, it was sometimes difficult to differentiate whether the service providers were talking about EYOP or YSAS, and the qualitative data should be read with this limitation in mind. Nevertheless, given that a number of themes identified by other services (e.g. problems with information sharing) did not arise for YSAS, it is useful to briefly describe the arrangement present between EYOP and YSAS – specifically YSAS in SD3. The working relationship between EYOP youth workers and YSAS youth workers may represent a useful model that could be adopted during the development of relationships between EYOP and other agencies .

YSAS and EYOP

YSAS highlighted two important aspects that allowed for greater cooperation between EYOP youth workers and YSAS youth workers. The first was the ability of EYOP youth workers to access the YSAS case management system, and to verbally notify YSAS of which young people had been involved with EYOP in the preceding shift.

TThe second important factor was common team meetings between EYOP youth workers and YSAS youth workers and the increase of informal information sharing (for example when bumping into each other in the workplace).

YSAS services have a priority in SD3; if a young person can be allocated to a YSAS service, they are. If not, then another service is considered.

As a general model EYOP in SD3 appears to funnel largely into YSAS services, and it is these services which work with EYOP youth to increase their readiness for engaging with other support services.

But once EYOP and YSAS were on same system, very useful – they can see who was in custody on weekend. Change in that, very helpful. Better service – shared case management system. [YSAS][1]

I speak with them a lot … Wouldn’t have had a week where we haven’t had multiple contacts across the board. [YSAS]

They [EYOP] come with a list. We go through the list to see if it fits a service, if not then we try to decide which service to refer to in the area.. [YSAS]

[1]Here the YSAS youth worker was referring to the sharing of information as outlined in the descriptive text

Engagement of EYOP clients

The difficulties surrounding engagement of young people referred to services was one of the most consistent themes identified. All service providers who rely on voluntary attendance (c.f. mandated attendance) stated there were low rates of referral uptake

We've had an extensive amount of referrals have come through. None of them have registered into the program [Employment]

We have experienced a very high rate of young people that aren't attending their initial face to face assessment at [service] [Mental Health]

There is a difference [in engagement] from the young people referred through from Centrelink – because Centrelink make them think it's a compliance based framework.... That initial response to a young person that they have to attend or payments will be cut – they will have more luck for them attending. [Employment]

A number of services suggested that some young people referred to them were not ready to engage with their service. Service providers suggested that rather than agreeing to a referral because they wanted to attend the service, young people "might feel obliged to have that referral done" because they were "with police, with EYOP" and simply wanted "to get out of the police station, so will say yes to anything".

Our intake team are seeming to do a lot of work for young people who are either not ready to engage at [service] or are not wanting support from [service]. [Mental Health]

We're a voluntary program, some people are just not at the right place to engage with us. [Housing]

More reluctant than most. Most of our families are desperate to see us. There is just that feeling (with EYOP referrals) that they've been mandated, just that feeling that they don't want to do it [Family Intervention]

Communication with EYOP youth workers

Broadly, service providers who had strong formal links with EYOP, or had high levels of interaction with EYOP team members (through, for example, regular team meetings or being situated in the same building) felt positively about communication with then EYOP team. Comments from these service providers reflected positive, open, regular formal and informal communication.

Generally [the EYOP team] have been really good, have really open communication [Legal Service]

We're regularly chatting throughout the case [ACM]

Where organisations don't have such a pre-existing relationship, comments reflected problems with communication including less regular communication and sometimes no contact. Some service providers also commented that communication was impeded by the "antisocial hours" that EYOP workers are on the job, which at times resulted in service providers "playing phone tag" with the EYOP.

We get a cold referral that comes through and try to make contact with worker, and can't. … We never hear back from EYOP [Family Intervention Service]

For many services, the relationship between service providers and EYOP depends on the relationships between specific professionals working with EYOP or a support service, rather than the relationship between the organisations per se. The research team was unable to speak to two services who were approached, as the only workers who had contact with EYOP clients had left, and the rest of the service was unfamiliar with the EYOP program.

I have a good relationship with one specific youth worker. Mainly talk to him, he would give feedback to other youth workers etc. [Employment]

Areas needing improvement

It was universally perceived that warm referrals are very beneficial and facilitate engagement when they occur;

Some service providers reported that warm referrals were not happening, or had dropped off after initially occurring, in contradiction of EYOPs warm referral model.

> *[The youth worker] would ring, say I've just put in a provisional referral, and we'd have a chat, she's talked to the family, and that makes a huge difference – that soft entry, everyone is known to each other [Family Intervention]*

> *[It would be great] If the EYOP worker accompanies them to their first appointment. Somewhere where there's a familiar and comfortable space for the young person. Less hesitant to come in if they have a familiar worker with them – even for the first 5-10 minutes to make introductions. [Employment]*

A number of services also stated that greater inter-agency collaboration would be beneficial. Better information sharing – both formal and informal – was raised as a key issue here, but a number of organisations also commented that greater 'overlap' in terms of, for example, common team meetings and working hours would be beneficial by itself.

> *[There is] not as much overlap with the EYOP team members as we'd like. … Some of the issues are with regard to hours not overlapping. [AOD]*

> *Try to now create a regular meeting with EYOP… We have not yet had EYOP sit on a care team meeting – probably not going to happen due to resourcing issue [Justice Service]*

Service providers talked about resourcing issues, admitting that "we are drowning in terms of numbers". A number of young people also reflected on availability of appropriate services.

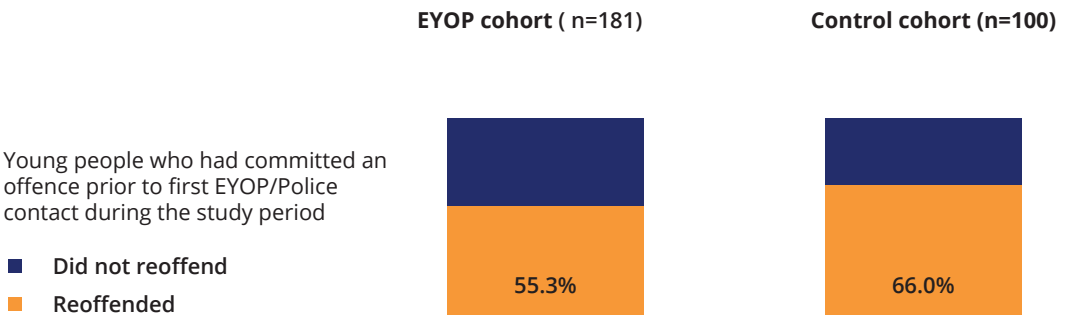
> *[youth worker] got me in with [drug and alcohol service], but went there and like all these old druggies there … like dopped up and that, getting their done [methadone] or something … was not good, not comfortable, so I didn't go back … they didn't call so just didn't go back. (YP 2)*

Offending and victimisation outcomes in EYOP clients

Short term offending outcomes

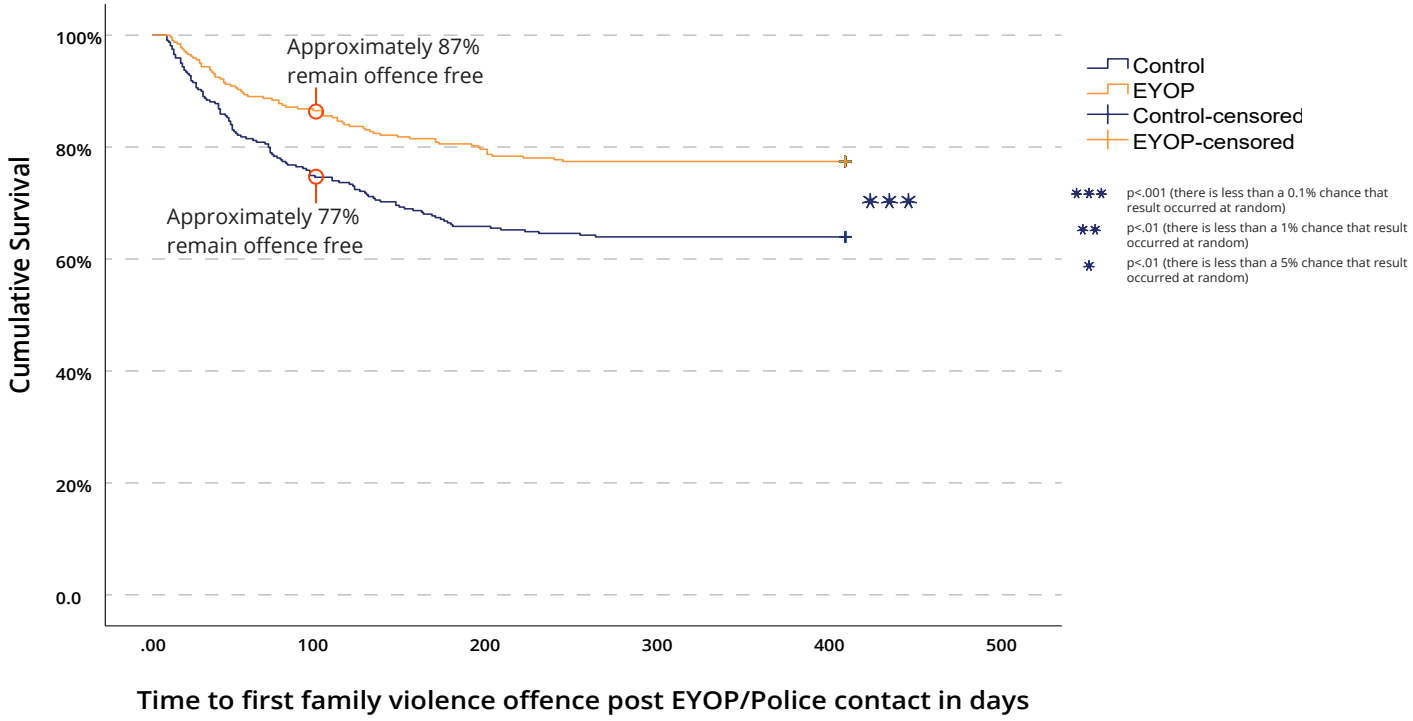
There was no significant association between cohort and reoffending of any type. Based on the available data, it appears that the EYOP cohort were no more likely to reoffend within a three month period following EYOP/Police contact than the control cohort.

Likelihood of reoffending of any type in the EYOP and control cohorts



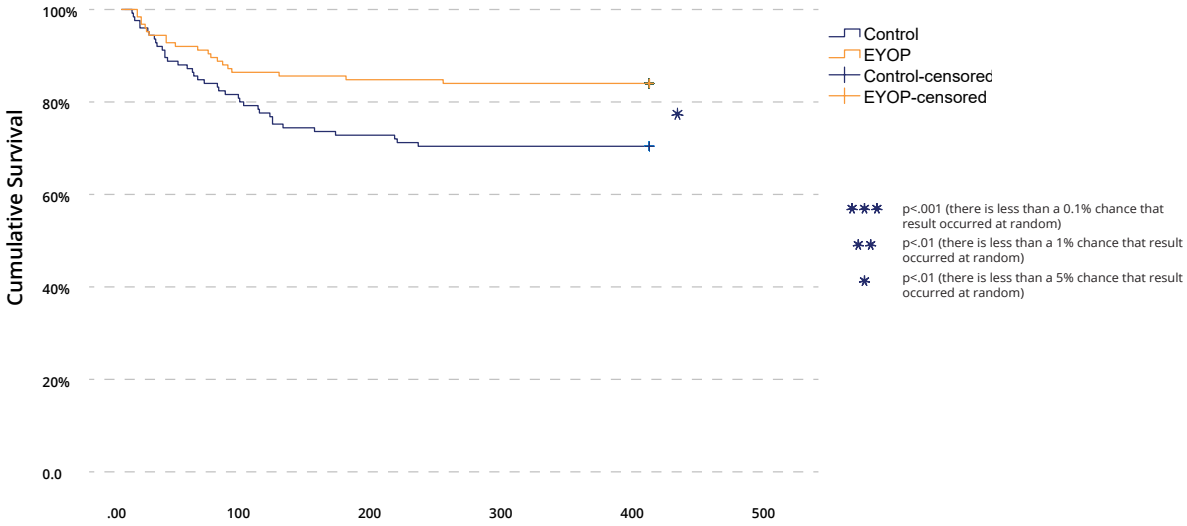
Time to offending

EYOP clients with a history of offending took significantly longer than the matched control group to commit a family violence related offence following EYOP/Police contact.

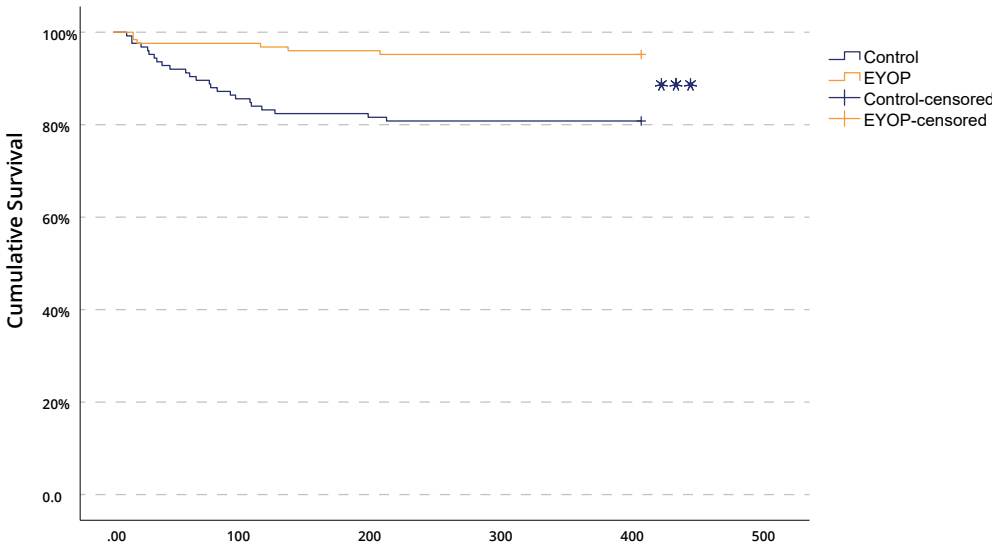


Time to first family violence offence post EYOP/Police contact in days

EYOP clients without a history of offending took significantly longer than the matched control group to commit an offence of any type and to commit family violence related offences following EYOP/Police contact



Time to first offence of any type post EYOP/Police contact in days

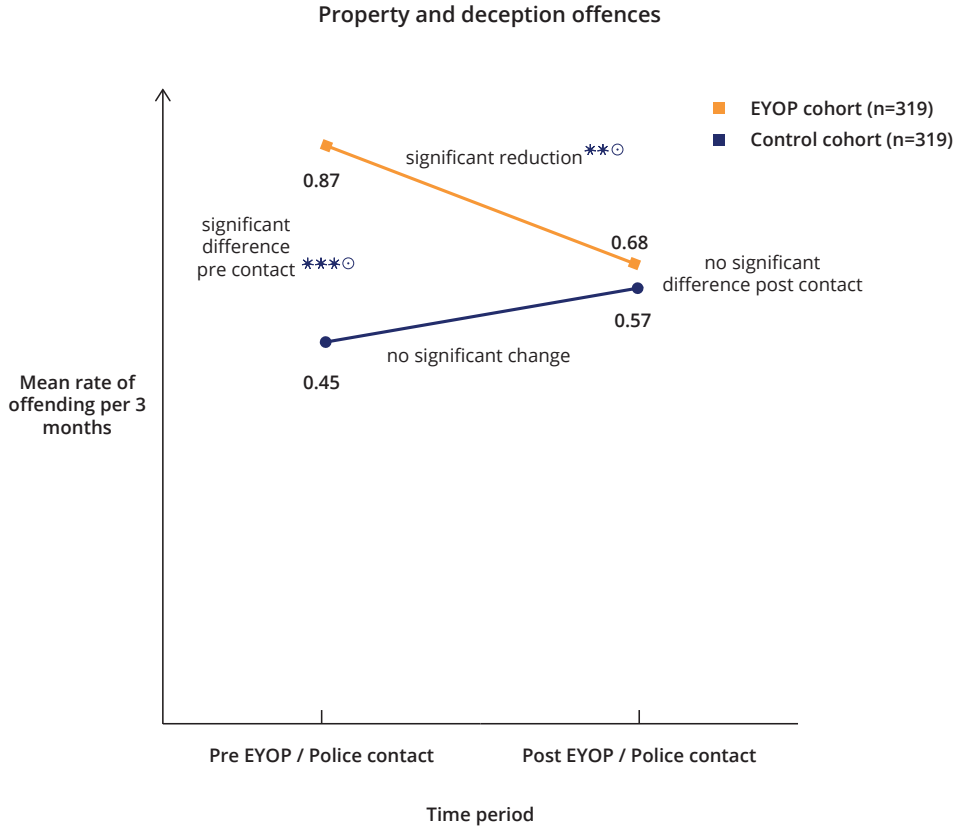


Time to first family violence offence post EYOP/Police contact in days

Frequency of offending

Young people with a history of offending

In young people with a history of offending prior to first EYOP/Police contact there were some indications of a 'reduction based' effect of EYOP intervention on offences against the person and property and deception offences. For these offence types the EYOP cohort showed a significant reduction in the rates of offending over time while the rates in the control cohort remained relatively stable over the same time period.



*** p<.001 (there is less than a 0.1% chance that result occurred at random)

** p<.01 (there is less than a 1% chance that result occurred at random)

* p<.01 (there is less than a 5% chance that result occurred at random)

~ Negligible effect size

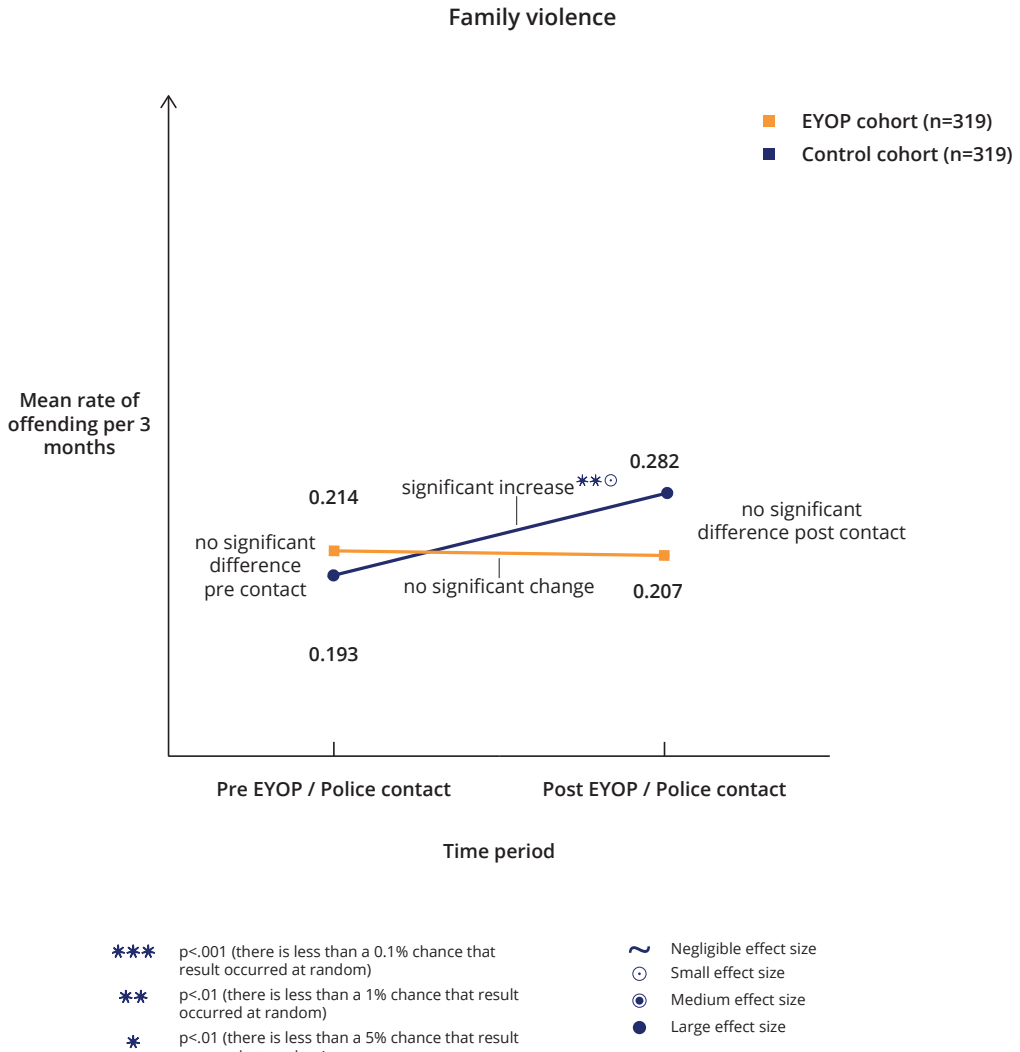
⊙ Small effect size

◉ Medium effect size

● Large effect size

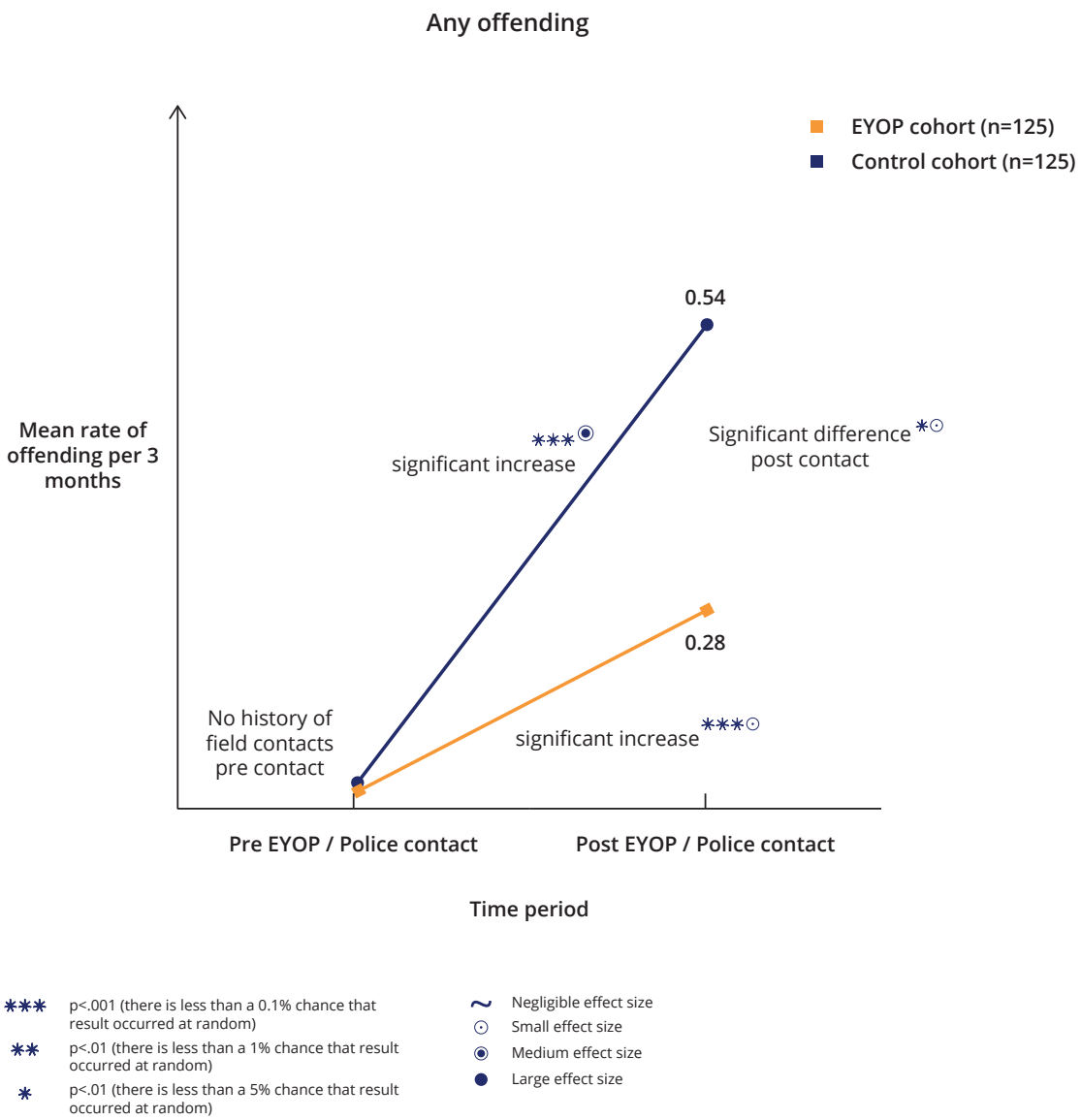
These graphs are intended to assist with the visualisation of the pattern of findings. It should be noted that the outcome data were skewed and contained outliers. As such the means presented should be interpreted with this in mind. The statistical analyses conducted accounted for the skewed data

There some indication of an 'escalation prevention based' intervention effect for offending of any type, justice procedure offences and family violence offences in young people with a history of offending. Here the EYOP group showed no significant change over time in the rates of these offences, while the rates in the control cohort increased significantly over time. However there were no significant group differences in the rate of these offence types during the post contact period, and as such these intervention effects should be treated as indicative rather than substantive.



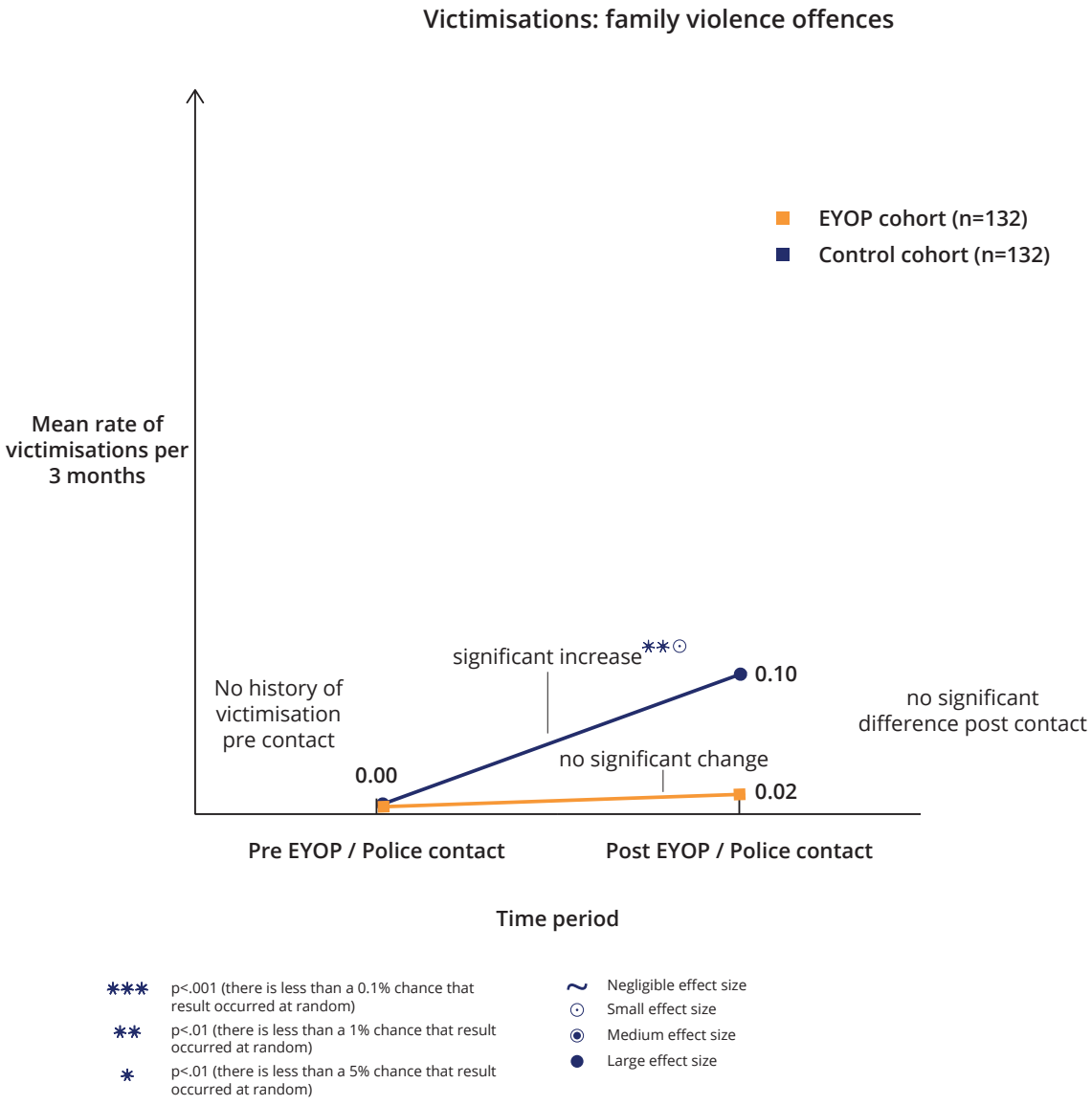
Young people without a history of offending

In young people without a history of offending prior to first EYOP/Police contact there was some evidence of an 'escalation prevention based' intervention effect on the rates of offending of any type, drug offences and family violence offences. The intervention effects were most substantive for offending of any type and family violence offences, with the rates of offending increasing significantly over time in the EYOP and control group, but with rates significantly lower in the EYOP group during the post contact period.



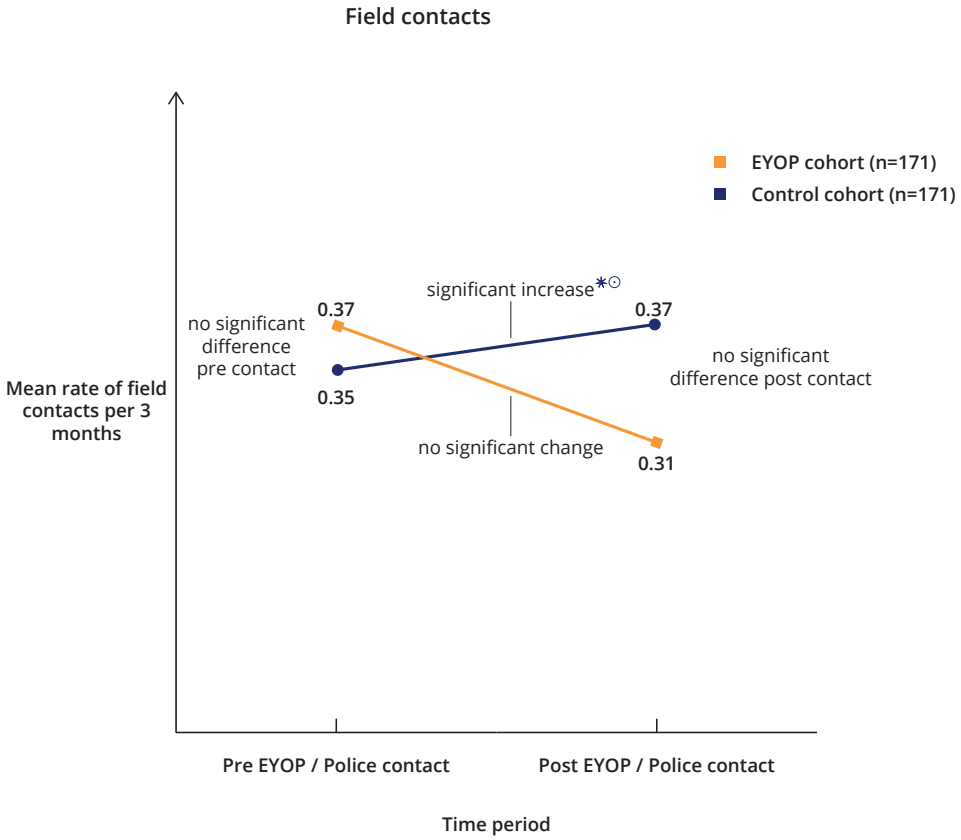
Frequency of victimisation

There was no evidence of an intervention effect on victimisation of any type in young people with a history of victimisation. In young people without a history of victimisation there was some indication of an 'escalation prevention based' intervention effect on the rates of family violence related victimisations. Here, the rates of victimisation increased significantly over time in the control cohort, but remained stable in the EYOP cohort. However the lack of a group difference in rates during the post contact period renders this finding indicative rather than substantive.



Frequency of field contacts and missing person incidents

In young people with a history of these incidents, there was some indication of an 'escalation prevention' intervention effect on the rates of field contacts. Here, the rates of field contacts increased significantly over time in the control cohort, but remained relatively stable in the EYOP cohort. However the lack of a group difference in rates during the post contact period renders this finding indicative rather than substantive. There was no evidence of an intervention effect on missing persons incidents in young people with a history of this type of incident.



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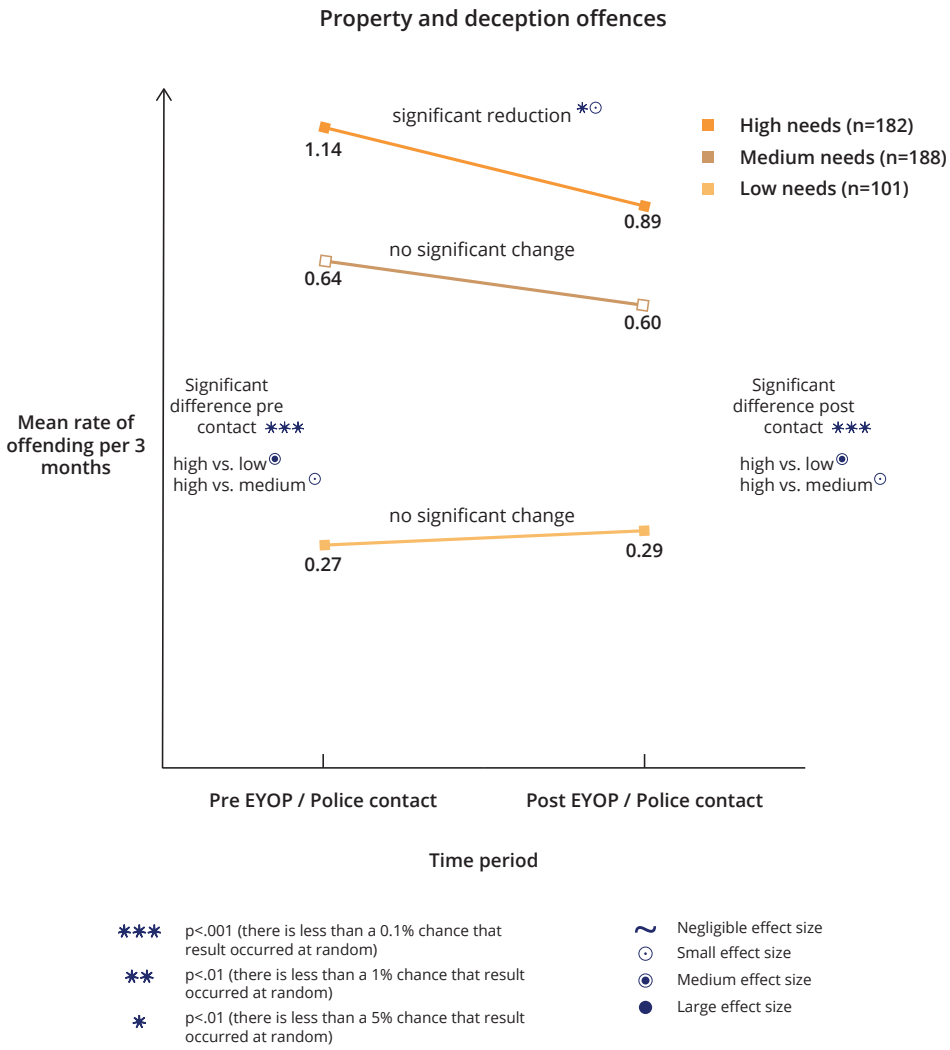
There was no indication of an intervention effect on field contacts or missing persons incidents in young people who did not have a history of this type of incident.

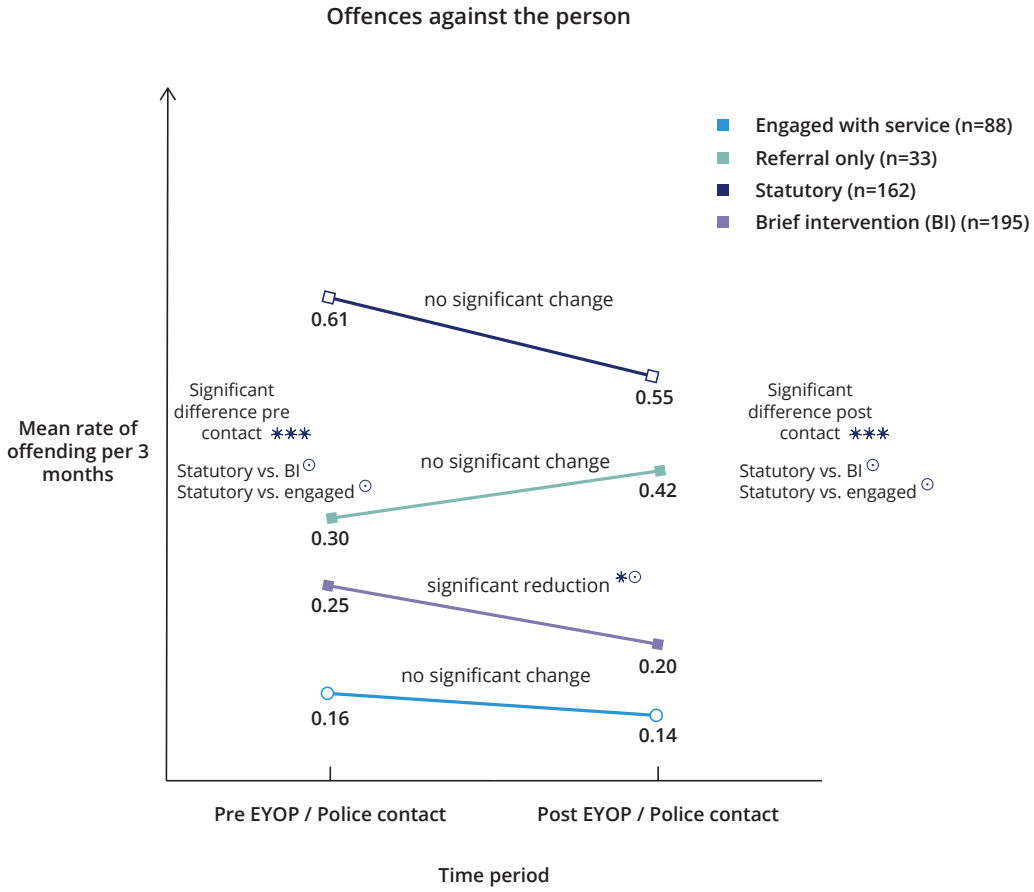
Frequency of offending across different levels of criminogenic need.

During the pre EYOP contact period, EYOP clients with a high level of criminogenic need had a significantly higher rate of offences against the person and property and deception offences than clients with medium and low levels of ciminogenic need. The high need group also demonstrated a significant reduction in the rate of these offence types from pre to post EYOP contact (small effect size), although their rates remained significantly higher then the low and medium groups during the post contact period (small effect size for offences against the person and a moderate effect size for property and deception offences). Rates of these offence types did not change significantly over time in either the low or medium criminogenic needs groups.



Frequency of offending across different levels of EYOP intervention

In EYOP clients with a history of offending, only the group of young people who received a brief intervention from EYOP (no referral to a support service) demonstrated a significant reduction in the rates of offences against the person and property and deception offences over time (small effect sizes). These findings suggest that the reductions in the overall rate of offending, offences against the person, and property and deception offences observed in the overall EYOP cohort, may be driven primarily by reductions in offence rates in the brief intervention sub-cohort. However, it should be noted that the brief intervention group was heterogeneous and included young people who did not consent to receiving a referral, alongside those who were assessed as not requiring further support by the EYOP team. As such, it is likely that this subsample represented a range of criminogenic need levels.



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Cost effectiveness

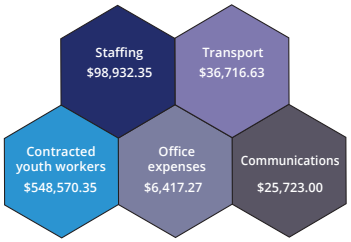
A cost/effectiveness framework was used to gauge the net value of the program, incorporating both financial and non-financial costs and benefits. The cost-efficiency analysis includes both financial and non-financial information. As the results show, the benefits of the EYOP program outweigh the costs and provides value for money. Given the overall benefits of the program in reducing offending, EYOP contributes to financial and social benefits.

Program costs

September 2018

May 2019

Direct costs



Total direct cost	$716,360
Average direct cost per month	$79,595.56
'In kind' costs of police support per month	$7,721.00
Total 'In kind' costs	$69,489.00
Total annual direct costs	$955,146.72
Total annual 'in kind' costs	$92,625.00
Total annual costs (direct + 'in kind')	$1,047,798.67

Cost per client / intervention

784 Young people had EYOP contact during the evaluation period

$913.72 Direct cost per person, per contact

$1002.36 Direct + 'in kind' cost per person, per contact

300 Young people referred to an external service for further support

$2,387.87 Direct cost per referral

$1,002.36 Direct + 'in kind' cost per referral

Offending outcomes

319 EYOP clients with a history of offending over the evaluation period

9% Reduction in the annual rate of offending in EYOP clients following intervention

0.64 Fewer offences per person per 12 months

319 matched controls with a history of offending over the evaluation period

38% Increase in the annual rate of offending in the matched control sample over the same time period[1]

1.72 More offences per person per 12 months

2.36 Fewer offences per person per 12 months in EYOP clients compared to controls

425.33 EYOP clients with a history of offending per year (estimate based on evaluation figures)

1002.26 Fewer offending related police contacts over a one year period

EYOP intervention cost per outcome

$913.63 Direct cost per offence prevented

$1,045.44 Direct + 'in kind' cost per offence prevented

Potential costs with no intervention

$48,131.93 Per completed episode of supervision (community based only)[2]

[1]The control group had a lower offending rate than the EYOP cohort prior to first Police contact during the evaluation period, which would serve to exaggerate the size of these differences

[2]In 2018-19, Victoria spent daily averages of $257.39 and $ 1,748.42 per young person in community-based supervision and detention, respectively (Source: Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, *Report on Government Services 2020*). As it is unknown precisely how many of the prevented contacts would have resulted in each type of supervision, these costs cannot be further quantified with certainty. Based on the most recent figures (current to 30 June, 2019), the median total time of completed supervision (combined community-based supervision and detention) was 187 days (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2020).