

6 Case management and service delivery

At a glance

Background

Delivering services to rehabilitate and address young offenders' needs requires an integrated case management approach by government and other service providers.

Key findings

Youth justice units and youth justice custodial centres use effective case management practices to:

- establish clear aims and objectives for young offenders
- match the level of interventions with the assessed level of risk
- meet the needs of indigenous offenders through Koori justice programs
- support the reintegration of young offenders' into the community.

The Criminal Justice Diversion Program has effective processes in place to ensure that young offenders become aware of the consequences of their behaviour and provide restitution to their victims and the community. Victims are involved at all stages of the diversion process and have the opportunity to provide input into the development of the diversion plan and feedback on the diversion outcomes.

Key recommendation

- DHS should:
 - ensure that young offenders agree and sign off against the goals and objectives identified in their client services plans
 - implement appropriate systems to clearly and consistently document a young offender's progress towards their case management goals
 - review the effectiveness of parole planning and post-release programs to facilitate access to support services and the reintegration of young offenders returning to rural and remote areas
 - develop a standardised service plan for the management of young offenders on supervised bail (**Recommendation 6.1**).

6.1 Integrated case management and service delivery

Delivering services to help rehabilitate and address the needs of young offenders requires government and other service providers to take an integrated approach to case management and service delivery.

In this part of the audit we examined case management practices and the extent to which services and interventions were aligned to the factors causing offending behaviour, the risks of reoffending and the identified needs of young offenders. The audit also examined whether there was effective pre- and post-release support provided to enable young offenders released from custodial supervision to reintegrate into the community.

6.1.1 Department of Human Services

Youth justice units

The audit identified good practice in the management of young offenders' cases and in the delivery of services at youth justice units.

Case planning—the review of a selection of case files confirmed that all young offenders have Client Services Plan (CSP) and an allocated case worker. CSP details individual goals and provides a basis for the coordination of interventions/services required to address the underlying issues that contribute to offending behaviour. DHS ensure young offenders actively participate in the development of CSPs. The additional practice of seeking the young person's signature to the plan is considered better practice and should be further promoted across the program.

There were areas of the case planning process that could be improved by:

- using plain English so that young offenders can better understand the requirements of their case plans
- ensuring that all young offenders sign off their case planning goals
- ensuring that appropriate systems are in place to clearly and consistently document a young offender's progress towards their case management goals.

Intensity of case management—is determined through the Victorian Offender Needs Indicator for Youth (VONIY), which is used to match the intensity of the intervention to the young person's assessed level of need and risk. Case managers of high-risk offenders are able to override the level of intervention recommended through VONIY to ensure that such offenders receive the required level of intervention.

Access to services—the review of case management practices and case files found that CSPs include information on referrals and linkages with government agencies and community organisations that provide services, including drug and alcohol, housing, or family violence programs, to address the needs and risks identified through the needs identification process.

Challenging offending behaviour—Youth justice workers focus on challenging offending behaviour through structured casework interventions and the application of the Changing Habits and Reaching Targets program. Through this program young offenders receive training to apply problem-solving skills, effective coping strategies and to think about the consequences of their actions to assist them to modify and maintain behaviour changes and prevent relapse. The influence on offenders' behaviour was documented on case files.

Supporting indigenous clients—Koori justice programs provide support and supervision for young Koori offenders on community-based orders and in youth custodial centres. Through these programs, Koori justice workers act as role models for young Koori offenders and provide culturally sensitive support and advocacy and case work.

In terms of service planning, all young Koori offenders are offered the opportunity to have a community representative present at their client assessment and planning meeting. Koori agencies consulted as part of this audit indicated they are appropriately engaged in the youth justice process and that the needs of young Koori offenders are being met in a culturally sensitive manner.

Workforce development—Case management is underpinned by the recruitment of qualified staff. DHS has pre-entry standards for youth justice workers, including Bachelor of Social Work, Associate Diploma in Welfare Studies or other tertiary qualifications appropriate to welfare practice. Induction training is provided to new youth workers by DHS and includes assessment practices and the use of VONIY.

Youth justice custodial centres

The audit identified good practice in the management of young offenders' cases and in the delivery of services at youth justice custodial centres. Good practice included:

Case planning—Case planning at youth justice custodial centres is underpinned by the uses of CSP, with service delivery coordinated by allocated key workers who are responsible for implementing case plans.

Intensity of case management—The review of a selection of case files showed that the level and nature of interventions reflected the assessed level of client risks and needs. For example, high-risk clients at the Parkville Custodial Centre rated as requiring an intensive level of intervention were characterised by significantly more temporary leaves for counselling and other specialist interventions.

Access to services—Is organised by custodial staff and young offenders who jointly identify their educational and recreational interests. The custodial centres have formalised relationships with TAFEs, schools and educational providers, with services provided onsite. Audit found that young offenders were consistently supported to access to a wide range of services aimed at developing life skills. Offenders are also able to access employment opportunities outside the centres through access to leave.

The Malmsbury Custodial Centre has its own facility that delivers health services and intervention programs. This accorded with better practice because health service delivery was fully integrated into the overarching case management process. By contrast, health services at the Parkville and Melbourne Custodial Centres are contracted and there is limited involvement of health staff with custodial staff in case planning for young offenders.

Supporting indigenous clients—Custodial centres have formal links to indigenous community representatives and there are clear guidelines for the case management of indigenous clients with Koori support workers engaged at all stages of in the case management process.

Workforce development—Is being addressed through the Youth Justice Custodial Services plan, which has identified training needs for custodial staff.

Pre- and post-release transition—Support to reintegrate young offenders back into the community is provided by regional youth justice staff in conjunction with the young offenders and custodial staff, resulting in the development of a parole plan.

Pre-release support

A key element of pre-release support for young offenders in custody is the Temporary Leave Program, which supports young offenders' rehabilitation and reintegration back into the community. Temporary leave enables young offenders to participate in a range of activities, including employment, education and training, visits with family and friends, and meeting with counsellors and health treatment services that will provide support after their release from custody.

In 2007 DHS commissioned an evaluation of the Temporary Leave Program. Its key findings were that young offenders who participated in the program:

- showed improvements in relationships with family and peers
- gained a better standard of accommodation after release from custody
- were more likely to persevere with work.

Post-release support

Parole is an essential post-release support provided to young offenders in custody. Through parole orders young offenders are able to serve part of a custodial sentence in the community under the supervision of parole workers.

Our review of selected case files identified that parole plans facilitate the transition of a young offender back into the community and include:

- proposed accommodation arrangements
- referral to services aimed at reducing reoffending behaviour
- referrals to services aimed at addressing identified needs and employment and training opportunities.

The audit found that when community-based youth justice workers worked with young offenders following their release from custodial supervision, the offender's reintegration into the community was enhanced by encouraging their continuation of training courses, helping them to maintain family relationships, and preparing them to undertake job interviews.

Access to support services post-release

Parole planning was more difficult when the young offender returned to a region distant from the custodial centre. In these cases, there is the risk that the young offender would not have the opportunity to access post-release services or build rapport with their regional youth justice worker prior to parole.

The Youth Parole Board's Annual Report for 2006–07 stated that there can be difficulties in accessing appropriate services in rural areas, including accommodation services, particularly for those with a disability and mental health issues. This may result in parole being delayed or resulting in a level of support that is insufficient to ensure the effective reintegration of the young offender into the community.

In recognition of this, DHS is implementing a new service delivery model for community sector agencies that is designed to provide better access to services for young offenders at the regional level.

Adult Court Advice and Support Service

The Adult Court Advice and Support Service (ACAS) practice guidelines govern the management of young offenders on supervised bail, facilitate referrals and access to community-based services, and assist young offenders to demonstrate their progress over the bail period.

Case planning—Case planning and management would be improved by requiring that all young offenders under ACAS supervision have a management plan. In recognition of this, DHS is:

- developing a standard format for a bail plan for young people at risk of breaching bail or reoffending. Once completed this may be incorporated into the Client Relationship Information System as a standard management process
- reviewing current bail assessment 'tools' to develop a standard risk and needs assessment tool.

Intensity of case management—ACAS uses an age and developmentally appropriate approach to determine the level of services required to address the identified risks and needs of young offenders who are placed on supervised bail.

Access to services—ACAS adequately facilitates access to services through:

- the provision of advice in relation to bail support services, including accommodation, appropriate treatment or program availability
- liaison with judges and magistrates, legal personnel and court support services to coordinate the referral of young offenders to relevant community services
- assistance to identify appropriate diversionary strategies.

Challenging offending behaviour—ACAS provides adequate case management and supervises the progress made by young offenders to meet the conditions of their placement, and the extent to which they demonstrate a change in behaviour. This includes the completion of specified tasks over the period of supervision, actively sustaining employment or abstaining from alcohol or drug use.

Conclusion

Through their client service plans, the case management practices of youth justice units and youth justice custodial centres:

- establish clear aims and objectives for young offenders
- match the intensity of interventions with the assessed level of risk of reoffending
- provide a range of services to address offenders' risks, needs and anti-social attitudes and behaviours and raise an awareness of victims
- meet the needs of indigenous offenders through Koori justice programs
- provide pre- and post-release support to facilitate the reintegration of young offenders into the community.

Case management could be further improved by:

- enhancing the capability of youth justice custodial staff through case management training
- enhancing the quality and consistency of assessment documentation used in CSPs and requiring that young offenders signoff against their identified rehabilitative goals at youth justice units.

Pre-release programs provided to young offenders support their rehabilitation and reintegration back into the community. However, in rural areas there are particular difficulties in parole planning and accessing services post-release. This can delay support or result in insufficient levels of support to assist the effective reintegration of young offenders into the community.

Recommendation

6.1 DHS should:

- ensure that young offenders agree and sign off against the goals and objectives identified in their client service plans
- implement appropriate systems to clearly and consistently document a young offenders' progress towards their case management goals
- review the effectiveness of parole planning and post-release programs to facilitate access to support services and the reintegration of young offenders returning to rural and remote areas
- develop a standardised service plan for the management of young offenders on supervised bail.

6.1.2 Magistrates' Court of Victoria

Criminal Justice Diversion Program

The Criminal Justice Diversion Program (CJDP) focuses on:

- holding offenders accountable for their actions so they show remorse and make restitution
- linking offenders with interventions that address their identified needs, prevent reoffending and diverting progress through the youth and adult justice system.

Case planning—Prior to any appearance before a magistrate, diversion coordinators interview offenders to identify services required to address their risks and needs. A diversion plan is developed which specifies conditions that may require the offender to undertake rehabilitation or to attend counselling to address identified needs.

In many cases, diversion coordinators rely on the offender to identify issues of relevance to them. As stated earlier in this report, given the relative immaturity of young offenders, this process may present additional difficulties to diversion coordinators to identify services that are needed to address the underlying causes of their offending behaviour and assist in their rehabilitation.

Needs identification and case management were not an issue at the Neighbourhood Justice Centre (NJC) in Collingwood. Diversion coordinators refer offenders to other government service providers co-located at NJC for a needs assessment and referral services and interventions required to address their identified risks and needs.

Intensity of case management—Case management of offenders placed on diversion is not as intense as that provided to offenders on community-based orders and those under custodial supervision. This is because diversionary clients are assessed at a lower level of risk.

Access to services—Diversion coordinators refer clients to services identified in the diversion plan as determined by the court. This involves either a direct referral to the service provider or requires the offender to make contact with the service provider themselves. Diversion coordinators stated that they have arrangements in place with local service providers who work with offenders on diversion, such as the Salvation Army or local community health services.

Challenging offending behaviour—CJDP has a strong emphasis on demonstrating remorse and making appropriate restitution. Letters of apology to the victim and/or victim compensation are the most frequently used conditions in diversion plans. Other conditions, such as community work and donations are also used to make restitution for offending behaviour.

Importantly, victims are engaged in CJDP and they can provide input into the determination of the diversion conditions, may be present at the hearing or receive feedback about the outcomes of the diversion. At the completion of the diversion plan, feedback from the victim on their satisfaction with the process is also sought.

If the offender does not successfully complete the diversion conditions and/or attend rehabilitation or counselling services as required, the matter is referred back to the Mention Court of the Magistrates' Court of Victoria, as if the matter was being listed for the first time. All information regarding the diversion is removed from the file and the offender risks having a criminal conviction recorded if found guilty of the offence.

Conclusion

Young offenders participating in CJDP are usually assessed as being low risk and so do not typically receive intensive case management.

CJDP has effective processes in place to ensure that young offenders become aware of the consequences of their behaviour and provide restitution to their victims and the community. Victims are involved at all stages of the diversion process and have the opportunity to provide input into the development of the diversion plan and feedback on the diversion outcomes.
