

Role of the Youth Sector in Crime Prevention

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The youth sector is a significant player in crime prevention. Provision of crisis support, accommodation, alcohol and other drug services and recreational activities all contribute to the web of services, programs and initiatives which prevent crime. Young people would be more likely to be involved in crime, if it were not for these services (though proving a direct relationship between crime prevention and existing youth services can at times be challenging).

It is possible for youth services to provide an even greater contribution to crime prevention, if certain steps are taken. The following provides some guidance about ways that more effective intervention can be achieved.¹

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| Strategy & Culture | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Targeted Approach – target areas and young people most at risk of offending. Local crime data and liaison with police can help identify areas and individuals at-risk, peak times of offending, common offences and critical causes. • Establish clearly defined objectives associated with identified risk factors; ambiguous or ill-directed interventions will not prevent crime. |
| Service Design & Delivery | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intensive intervention, ensuring that sufficient hours and weeks are invested to tackle (often) long-standing issues. • Place young people at the centre of any program – promote participation, build rapport, build ownership. • Utilise educational methods and activities that are engaging, challenging and associated with addressing identified needs. |
| Staffing & Resources | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adequate resources must be available. • Staff must be provided with appropriate training, supervision and support. |
| Management | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build monitoring and evaluation into the program. • Establish clear procedures and protocols. |
| Relationships & Partnerships | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inter-agency partnerships are essential, as causes of crime are diverse. • Working with other agencies allows referral and informal counselling through a program. |

It should be apparent that many of the principles described above will be consistent with principles of effective youth work and program development. By being very clear about the purpose of a program, the specific risk factors being addressed and how the program will prevent crime, then it is likely that positive results will be achieved.

The following provides a few further tips for effectively preventing crime:

- Discuss youth crime at your local inter-agency meetings – a discussion across agencies might reveal some key youth crime trends that could be tackled by a partnership approach. For example, seasonal factors are often related to increases or decreases in crime. Malicious damage associated with under-age drinking increases in summer months, particularly in areas adjoining beaches, parks and reserves. A local roster to provide outreach services on weekend nights could help stem these events.

¹ The information provided has been drawn from Lowenstein, P.; Warburton, F. and Kelly, M. (1999) Modern Youth **Work and Crime Prevention**, NACRO / Crime Concern, London.

- Identify referral pathways – some young people who are cautioned by police will be at-risk of further offending if appropriate supports are not put in place. By working with the local Youth Liaison Officer (NSW Police Force), it might be possible to provide referral details for dissemination at cautions and if permission is provided by the young person (and his / her parents), contact could be made to facilitate contact with the youth service.
- Provide alternative services for young people disengaging from school – the point at which young people start to disengage from school is often a time when drift into offending is greatest. Working with local education services to provide meaningful alternatives for those students who are suspended or expelled will have many potential benefits.

Working with Young Offenders – Risk and Needs Principles

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Tackling offending behaviour is difficult. There will be diverse reasons for offending and diverse circumstances contributing to a young person's involvement in crime. Knowing how best to respond to these different needs and circumstances can make working with young offenders complex and confusing.

The following provides a series of principles that should guide interventions with young offenders. These principles help to ensure that the effort invested in working with a young person has the greatest chance of actually resulting in a reduction of offending behaviour.

| Principle | Example / Explanation |
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| Risk Principle: assess risk levels and allocate individuals to different levels of service accordingly. | 'Dosage' matters. A young person who is offending frequently and is assessed as having many risk factors, will require more intensive support / intervention. |
| Needs Principle: assess the dynamic criminogenic needs and risks of a young person, and target intervention towards their remediation. | Dynamic risk factors are those which can be changed. Alcohol and other drug use is an example. Static risk factors cannot be changed. Being a young male increases your chances of being involved in offending, but it cannot be changed. |
| Multi-modal approaches: focus on a range of criminogenic needs in recognition of the multiple factors associated with offending. | Use diverse strategies to tackle offending behaviour. Putting a young person in a basketball program to reduce boredom will not be sufficient if that young person also has problems with their education and witnesses violence in the home. In such a case, basketball might need to be complemented with individual tutoring and family support. |
| Continuity and integrity: develop coordinated strategies of monitoring continuity of services and care. | Case plan reviews, interagency meetings, professional supervision and program debriefing are ways that this can be achieved. |
| General responsivity: attempt to match services to the learning styles, motivations and aptitudes of participants within high quality interpersonal relationships. | Programs and individual work should seek to generally touch on the various learning styles (listening, watching, saying and doing) and acknowledge motivational factors (internal and external). |
| Specific responsivity: adapt intervention strategies to accommodate difference and diversity (age / gender / ethnicity / race / language) among participants and recognition of their strengths. | Individual needs should be understood and used in developing programs. Mixing young men and women, having ages spread from 10 to 18 and having one young Aboriginal person in a Anglo-Australian group might be barriers to participation. |
| Context responsivity: the most effective agencies will locate programmatic interventions within broader social arrangements, giving attention to variations in local contexts and client groups and adapting services accordingly. | Linking with other agencies and ensuring that programs reflect local considerations will be important. |

Source: McGuire, J. (2002) **Offender Rehabilitation and Treatment: Effective Programmes and Policies to Reduce Re-offending**, Wiley, West Sussex, England.