Youth Justice Programs Framework 2016–2019 ‘Fact Sheet A’

Characteristics of Effective Programs

**Theoretical base**:There is considerable research available illustrating the factors which have been demonstrated to reduce offending behaviour. It is expected that all program providers will demonstrate an understanding of the literature which provides the evidence base for their proposed program. An effective program will propose a plausible combination of theoretical argument and analysis of research to justify its facilitation to particular young people in order to reduce offending behaviour.

**Program Integrity**:Program integrity refers to the extent to which a program or service is delivered in practice in comparison to how it was intended in theory and design[[1]](#footnote-1).Program integrity includes two primary components: facilitator adherence to the intervention program manual, and facilitator competence in delivering the intervention program. Criminogenic programs must be designed and evaluated by well-qualified individuals and be delivered by staff with a high level of relevant expertise, experience, and skill.

**Developmentally responsive**:Programs and practices should reflect that children and young people’s development tends to occur in a series of stagescentred around age. While individual young people may develop at different rates, each stage provides the basis for the acquisition of new skills and abilities and program design should be responsive to the development level of the target participants.

**Multi-modal**: Given the complexity of offending behaviour and the diversity of the Youth Justice population, programs that address a range of criminogenic risk factors in an integrated and mutually reinforcing way are more likely to be appropriate for a larger target audience than programs which targets a specific criminogenic need in isolation.

**Sufficient Intensity**:Programs should be of sufficient length and intensity to impact on the targeted offending behaviours. For example, programs aiming to correct long-term behavioural challenges are unlikely to be successful in influencing change if conducted over a short timeframe. The amount, intensity, sequencing and spacing of a program should be related to the seriousness and persistence of offending behaviour, and to the range and seriousness of the criminogenic needs of participants.

**Greater intensity for young people with higher levels of risk (Risk Principle)**: Evidence suggests that criminogenic programs should focus on higher risk offenders; an intensive approach for low risk young offenders can lead to increased offending and contact with the criminal justice system. Sufficient program intensity should be determined by the young person’s assessed level of criminogenic need. It should be acknowledged that length of sentenced order is not always an indicator of intensity of need, therefore consideration should be given to whether a custodial or community-based program is more appropriate for a young person’s need.

**Skills oriented**: Programs that teach skills which are meaningful to the young person and useful for connecting with the wider community will provide young people with a greater likelihood of decreasing offending behaviour.

**Culturally proficient methods**: Programs with a cultural focus should be delivered by:

* Individual(s) or an organisation from the young person’s community or language group who is assessed as appropriate.
* Another person who identifies as the same culture who is compatible with the young person’s community or language group who is assessed as appropriate.
* Another person who identifies as the same culture who is assessed as appropriate[[2]](#footnote-2).

Having a specific cultural stream for programs which target a specific group of young people from a particular cultural group is vital, it is equally important to ensure all ‘mainstream’ programs are developed and facilitated in a manner which ensures the intervention is responsive to the unique needs of young people from all cultures.

For the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population, research[[3]](#footnote-3) has found interventions which focus on strengthening a young person’s connection to family, community and culture to be beneficial in decreasing offending behaviour, although levels of success can vary between individuals. Research shows the following features are shared by effective Aboriginal programs:

* Focusing on issues of specific relevance or concern to Aboriginal communities.
* Involving Aboriginal young people in the design and implementation of interventions aimed at reducing their offending.
* Utilising intergenerational, family and cultural supports (e.g. mentoring).
* Developing programs which target younger juveniles to maximise early interventions into youth offending.
* Involving members of the Aboriginal community in development and facilitation of programs[[4]](#footnote-4).

For the programs provided to young people to truly be considered as culturally inclusive, recent research suggests models must move away from simplistic notions of “cultural awareness” and “cultural competence” to embracing and utilising Indigenous thinking, views, and practices[[5]](#footnote-5). Through these means, programs will attain what is considered “cultural proficiency”. The spectrum of cultural competence is outlined in the table below[[6]](#footnote-6).

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| Cultural Destructiveness  | Intentional practices, attitudes and policies designed to subjugate individuals or cultures. |
| Cultural Incapacity  | Lack of capacity to help people from other cultures due to paternalistic and biased beliefs regarding those from another culture.  |
| Cultural Blindness  | The belief that methods of helping of the dominant culture are acceptable regardless of cultural belief. This approach ignores strengths and promotes assimilation.  |
| Cultural Pre-Competence  | The desire to deliver culturally competent services, including recruiting culturally diverse teams, however little consideration given to how cultural diversity interfaces with organisational objectives and often leads to tokenism. |
| Cultural Competence  | Acceptance and respect for different cultures, attention to dynamics of difference and adaption of services to best suit the needs of diverse populations.  |
| Cultural Proficiency  | Holding culture in high esteem, seeking to add knowledge to cultural competence in practice through research, service design and improving relationships between cultures.  |

Appropriate consultation with cultural community leaders is mandatory in the development of all programs and is a key criteria as part of the Program Review Panel endorsement process (outlined in detail in Appendix E).The Senior Aboriginal Advisor, Youth Justice, is the key liaison for ensuring all Youth Justice interventions and initiatives are responsive to the cultural needs of the Aboriginal population. As such, the Senior Aboriginal Advisor is a standing member of the Youth Justice Program Review Panel and the Youth Justice Program Strategy Group.

**Trauma-informed**:Due to the high prevalence of abuse and trauma in the personal histories of young people under supervision of Youth Justice, all program providers must demonstrate an understanding of the unique challenges involved in working with young people with significant histories of childhood abuse and trauma. Challenges are likely to vary between male and female populations.

Trauma-informed services are designed specifically to avoid retraumatising those involved in interventions. They seek ‘safety first’ and commit themselves to ‘do no harm’. By contrast, trauma-specific services have a more focused primary task on directly addressing trauma and its impact and to facilitate trauma recovery[[7]](#footnote-7).

The following key features are considered distinctive to trauma-informed practice[[8]](#footnote-8):

* All aspects of the program or service are organised to recognise and acknowledge trauma, its prevalence and its dynamics, in particular trauma-informed practice recognises that anyone may have experienced trauma which may or may not be known to others.
* Recognition that something has happened to the person rather than it being about what is wrong with the person.
* Being responsive to the impact of trauma, emphasising physical, psychological and emotional safety for those who have experienced trauma and service providers.
* Working to create opportunities for those who have experienced trauma to rebuild a sense of safety, control and power over their own situation.
* Recognising the importance of relationships as a means of promoting healing and recovery.
* Recognising the importance of the environment and aiming to create an environment where participants feel physically, emotionally, morally and culturally safe.
* Being grounded in and directed by an understanding of the neurological, biological, psychological and social effects of trauma and interpersonal violence.
* Acknowledging there are often particular trauma-related experiences and consequences for certain populations, such as people with intellectual disability.

**Accountability**:Youth Justice will work in concert with program providers to ensure programs are monitored to evaluate the effectiveness of programs and services against explicitly agreed service outcomes. Likewise, programs must be evaluated to ensure outcomes and goals established in the young person’s shared care plan are achieved.

**Evaluation**: While reducing re-offending is a key goal of many criminogenic programs, recidivism rates should not be the sole indicator of programmatic success. A commitment to ongoing evaluation of outcomes should be built into programs. In order to establish the link between the program intervention and client goals being met, it is necessary to demonstrate that a program has achieved its objectives through interim measures designed to measure change in the targeted dynamic risk factors.

Program goals should be realistic in order for the program to be reliably evaluated and existing program providers must be willing to undergo periodic program evaluation with results reported to the Program Review Panel.

Young people involved in development: As outlined under ‘Culturally Proficient Methods’, young people should be involved in the development of interventions which are intended to assist them in decreasing offending behaviour. This is not only important for ensuring culturally proficient programs, but is essential for all programs regardless of content and the intended intervention methods.

For any assistance or further information contact:

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3. Richards, K, Rosevear, L & Gilbert, R. (2011) “Promising interventions for reducing Indigenous juvenile offending”; Australian Institute of Criminology, Brief 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Barbour, B. (2010). Inquiry into service provision to the Bourke and Brewarrina communities. NSW Ombudsman. Sydney,NSW Ombudsman ISBN: 978-1-921131-63-9 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Gray, M., & Hetherington, T. (2007). “Hearing Indigenous Voices in Mainstream Social Work”. *Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Social Services*, 55-66. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Jackson, A. L., & Waters, S. E. (2015). “Taking Time – Framework: A trauma-informed framework for supporting people with intellectual disability”. Melbourne, Australia: Berry Street.pg.15 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Fallot, R. D., & Harris, M. (2006). “Trauma-informed services: A self-assessment and planning protocol”. Washington DC: Community Connections. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Jackson & Waters (2015). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)