

**The challenges of turning developmental theory into meaningful  
policy and practice**

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**The challenges of turning developmental theory into meaningful policy and  
practice**

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## **Abstract**

The Youth Justice Service began in 1999 in Queensland. It embodied a new vision for the supervision, rehabilitation and reintegration of young offenders serving community-based orders. Evidence suggests that the Youth Justice Service failed to change significantly the pathways of young offenders. A random sample of 190 clients drawn from the Youth Justice Service and Area Offices that used traditional approaches was analysed to determine the effect of the new service delivery model on recidivism. Logistic regression models showed that whether clients attended a Youth Justice Service or Area Office was not a predictor of recidivism. This chapter contextualises this failure. More generally, the chapter is about the challenge of translating developmental crime prevention theory into policy and practice, particularly within a government service delivery infrastructure. It highlights a number of fundamental operational factors that can undermine the success of a developmental intervention.

### **The promise of developmental prevention**

Developmental crime prevention programs have demonstrated many successes and a large literature emphasises the benefits of early-in-life interventions that prevent maladaptive pathways from becoming entrenched. In disrupting the developmental pathway early in the life-course, interventions can prevent the accumulation of disadvantage, as proposed by Sampson and Laub (1997) and Yoshikawa (1994).

Three successful developmental interventions that have been targeted at young children and have produced favourable outcomes are the High/Scope Perry Preschool Program (Weikart & Schweinhart, 1992), the Montreal Prevention Project (Tremblay,

Pagani-Kurtz, Masse, Vitaro, & Pihl, 1995) and the Seattle Social Development Project (Hawkins, Catalano, Kosterman, Abbot, & Hill, 1999).

Successes with older age groups, particularly adolescent offenders, can be far more difficult to achieve. Given that adolescence is a period that is marked by significant and continual biological and social change, the developmental life-course perspective provides a flexible lens through which to examine and interpret behaviour (Farrington, 2003). Developmental prevention similarly provides a flexible framework for a range of interventions that are appropriate to the physical, social and intellectual capacities and needs of young people. In general, interventions that target young people in their teenage years concentrate heavily on educational approaches targeted toward the adolescent in isolation (Wasserman & Miller, 1998, p. 242). Wasserman and Miller note that by age 15, individuals who are likely to manifest serious antisocial behaviour have already begun to do so and consequently interventions are often based on secondary prevention efforts aimed at altering the course of these developmental trends.

Multisystemic therapy (MST) is a treatment approach that has demonstrated long-term reductions in criminal behaviour and violence amongst high-risk young people. MST adopts a social-ecological approach to understanding anti-social behaviour, with criminal behaviour being viewed as influenced by a range of factors at the individual, family, peer, school and community levels (Henggeler, Cunningham, Pickrel, Schoenwald, & Brondino, 1996). The approach aims to influence antisocial behaviour by altering key aspects of the young person's social context in ways that promote

prosocial rather than antisocial behaviour by providing young people and their parents with the resources and skills needed to successfully navigate their social ecology.

Despite having evidence that developmental prevention can positively influence the pathways of young offenders, translating successful program logic from the clinical, or at least researcher-controlled, environment en masse to the broader social context is proving particularly challenging for researchers and program implementers (Homel, 2005). In western societies like Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States accessing large populations often means implementing programs using the service delivery apparatus of government. For example, early intervention programs that target young children are often operationalised through preschools and primary schools. Even those programs that engage non-government organisations to implement local initiatives (e.g., Sure Start in the United Kingdom and Communities for Children in Australia) are often centrally coordinated and function in accordance with multiple reporting, accountability and regulatory mechanisms. These additional obligations make it even more difficult to implement developmental prevention successfully at the population level.

### **The impetus for juvenile justice reform in Queensland**

The Youth Justice Service embodied a new vision for the supervision, rehabilitation and reintegration of young offenders serving community-based orders in Queensland.

The policy was developed after a period in the administration of youth justice in Australia that was characterised by significant legislative and policy change. The nation had experienced the first serious challenges to the prevailing welfare

orientation in the 1960's and 1970's, having gained impetus from similar trends in the United States, and a process of re-evaluation spurred a general move away from welfarism toward a more formal, neoclassical style of justice for juveniles. Like their counterparts in the United States, critics of the welfare model in Australia targeted the courts, demanding greater recognition of children's rights to formal justice and seeking abolition of indeterminate sentencing (Naffine & Wundersitz, 1994).

Accompanying the increased focus on procedural justice and pressure from victim advocacy groups, the concept of restorative justice also emerged onto the criminological landscape. While traditional cultures had practiced varying forms of restorative principles for centuries and, as Braithwaite (2003, p. 11) argues, victim reparation and victim empowerment had been occurring in the business context under the banner of Alternative Dispute Resolution for decades, the new paradigm that emerged in the 1980s was considered highly innovative. By the late 1980s, restorative justice programs were operating in Canada, the United States, Europe and Great Britain (Wundersitz, 1996). A more sophisticated attempt to apply principles of restorative justice occurred in New Zealand when in 1989 the *Children, Young Persons and their Families Act* provided the legislative framework for the introduction of family group conferencing into the system of juvenile justice. This Act embodied many restorative principles, including the central role of young people, victims and families in decision making, the importance of group consensus as an outcome of the decision making process and acknowledgement of the specific rights and needs of Indigenous people (Morris & Maxwell, 1992). Restorative justice was first trialled in Australia by local police in Wagga Wagga, NSW. Since this time, all

Australian states and territories have passed legislation providing that restorative justice principles feature in the treatment of young offenders.

The period from the 1970s to the 1990s saw the problem of youth crime entrenched firmly in the public agenda and despite little statistical evidence to support such an allegation, claims of a youth crime wave were widespread. Government agencies also separated the provision of juvenile justice from child protection in an attempt to provide a more even-handed approach to both issues. In response to these pressures, Australian state governments individually embarked on a prolonged period of review that resulted in extensive legislative and service delivery changes.

In addition to these international and national movements, Queensland politicians were under increased pressure to deliver transparent governance. The 1987 Commission of Inquiry into Possible Illegal Activities and Associated Police Misconduct, which found extensive, systematic police corruption in a pattern that had been established since the 1950s, and the political tolerance of that corruption in return for support and favours (Key Centre for Ethics Law Justice and Governance, 2001), meant that the government was in the mood for widespread reform. One of the most significant developments was the establishment of the Criminal Justice Commission (now known as the Crime and Misconduct Commission), an external oversight body which has independence from executive government and holds the power to investigate police, public servant and politicians. In response to demands for action in the area of youth justice, the Queensland government delivered the Juvenile Crime Strategy in the 1992-93 State Budget. This strategy incorporated two main types of reforms, (1) legislative reform, and 2) crime prevention initiatives that

embraced the principles of early intervention, developmental crime prevention and positive youth development.

On 4 August 1992, the juvenile justice provisions of the *Children's Services Act 1965* were repealed and were replaced with the *Juvenile Justice Act 1992* and the *Children's Court Act 1992*. The *Juvenile Justice Act 1992* in particular led the operational reform of the youth justice system. The new system was based on principles that sought to ensure fairness, divert young people from the official youth justice system, promote individual responsibility and provide increased roles for victims, family and the community.

Nearly seven years passed before service delivery in the area of community-based supervision was modified to reflect the changes made to the legislation. The juvenile justice component of the existing Area Office model was extracted and placed into a dedicated service delivery model, known as the Youth Justice Service. The new service model was first piloted in three locations in 1999, and has since replaced the traditional Area Office model in various locations throughout Queensland.

### **Youth Justice Services**

The Youth Justice Service is a policy initiative and service delivery framework that provides supervisory, rehabilitative and reintegrative services to young offenders on community based orders and young offenders leaving detention. The Youth Justice Service has two overriding goals. The first goal is to monitor the compliance of young offenders with the statutory obligations of their orders. The second goal focuses on



both addressing risk factors associated with the offending behaviour and assisting young people to develop skills to successfully navigate their pathways in the future. Reflecting this orientation, the case management process seeks to assist clients to gain insight into the causes and impacts of their offending, develop options for meeting their needs without offending, and develop skills, interests and networks that will better connect them to their community.

In theory, this case management process operates according to a number of key principles. Caseworkers manage 25 or fewer clients to ensure they have sufficient time to provide a quality service to every client. A team approach, whereby case management occurs within a wider framework that includes the young person, their family and relevant community networks or agencies, is promoted in an attempt to move away from the traditional case management model where caseworker and client work in isolation. A thorough assessment, which should include the client and their family, is conducted to discuss offending behaviour and identify possible interventions that will target identified needs. Based on this assessment, the program of needs-based interventions begins.

According to the policy documents, possible interventions include “counselling services, one-on-one programs, group based programs, rehabilitative programs, work based programs, community projects, education/vocation based services, cultural programs, advocacy and support services, personal development programs and health and living skills programs” (Department of Families Youth and Community Care Queensland, September 2000). Clients are referred to existing local service providers

where appropriate. Youth Justice Service program staff will develop specialised programs where suitable community-based programs cannot be identified.

### **Incorporating a developmental focus into crime prevention policy**

The Youth Justice Service policy demonstrates a clear alignment with the key principles of contemporary theories of human development. First, in recognising that young people have the ability to change their behaviour from offending to less serious offending or to desistance from offending, the concept adheres to the principle of relative behavioural plasticity. Secondly, the aim of the Youth Justice Service policy to incorporate key stakeholders from the young person's social-relational contexts (i.e., families, extended families) and sociocultural contexts (i.e., schools, community and cultural networks) into the process acknowledges that the bases for this behavioural change lie in the individual's transactions with actors in these multiple domains (Homel, 2005). Thirdly, the policy recognises that working with young people in isolation discounts the significance of family and cultural networks, aligning with the principle that each level of human organisation functions as a consequence of its fusion or structural integration with other levels. This interdependence also means that change at any level will necessarily lead to continuity or discontinuity at another level.

It is evident that the Youth Justice Service attempted to operationalise developmental crime prevention, through a focus on:

1. the causes and correlates of offending through individualised case management;

2. rehabilitation and targeting interventions on offending behaviour;
3. age-appropriate interventions; and
4. the varied contexts of risk and protective factors.

However, despite these sound principles and the Department of Communities' commitment to the Youth Justice Service model, there is little empirical evidence to suggest that the new model delivered improved client outcomes in its first six years of operation.

### **Assessing the impact of Youth Justice Services on the pathways of young people**

The Youth Justice Service was evaluated to ascertain its impact on offending behaviour. The evaluation incorporated a broad view of intervention that examined policy and implementation factors. In the first phase of the evaluation, an assessment was made of the quality of the Youth Justice Service policy; did it represent a “good” policy? Key departmental documents were synthesised to determine the intention of the policy. Assessment of the quality of the policy was based on policy and implementation theory (Barrett, 2004; Ham & Hill, 1993; Levin, 1997; Lindblom, 1959; Pressman & Wildavsky, 1973; Simon, 1957), developmental and life-course criminology (Elder, 1994; Farrington, 2003; Sampson & Laub, 1997) and best practice principles for crime prevention (Australian Institute of Criminology, 2002; Homel, 2005; Latimer, Dowden, & Moreton-Bourgon, 2003; Wasserman & Miller, 1998).

In the next phase of the research an attempt was made, using an in-depth case study of a single Youth Justice Service, to reconcile the intention of the Youth Justice Service policy with the reality of service delivery, and to determine the effect of the service on future offending behaviour. An embedded case study design (Yin, 2003) facilitated an examination of the two key areas of service delivery and client outcomes. This study examined:

- the model of service delivery used to operationalise the Youth Justice Service concept;
- how well the model of service delivery aligned with the Youth Justice Service concept;
- the strengths and weaknesses of the model of service delivery; and
- how the model of service delivery affected outcomes for clients.

Evidence was gathered from staff and client interviews, direct observations, and reviews of procedure documents and case management files. The evidence was analysed according to four key themes: (1) organisational goals, (2) organisational climate, (3) method of operation, and (4) client pathways. The *explanation building* technique (Yin, 2003) was used to analyse the evidence. When using this technique the researcher stipulates a presumed set of causal links, drawing on knowledge of process and theory to arrive at critical insights about the case.

The final phase of the research sought to determine the impact of the policy. Given that a core goal of the Youth Justice Service is to reduce recidivism, the research examined the effect of the model on offending behaviour. In this study, a random

sample of 190 clients was drawn from the entire six-office population of Youth Justice Service and Area Offices in South-East Queensland over a three-year period. This research design made it possible to compare the impact of the Youth Justice Service with that of the traditional Area Office model. Information on individual, familial, educational and peer risk factors, criminal careers, and intervention factors was extracted from case management files and entered into a specially developed database. After a uniform 18-month period, official rearrest data were added to the database.

Chi-square analyses indicated that the Youth Justice Service was no more effective than the traditional Area Office model at reducing recidivism. In fact, while the result was not significant, the clients of the Youth Justice Service were 1.8 times more likely to reoffend than were clients from the Area Office. Logistic regression models were used to determine the influence of different models, after controlling for risk, intervention and compliance factors.

After introducing statistical controls, whether clients attended a Youth Justice Service or Area Office was not an important predictor of recidivism, confirming that the new service delivery model was no better at preventing recidivism than the traditional Area Office model. The factors that emerged from the sample as the most important predictors of recidivism were drug use, being influenced by delinquent peers, and having family problems that were not addressed by caseworkers. Notwithstanding the failure of the Youth Justice Service model to deliver improved outcomes to young people, survival analysis did demonstrate that the Youth Justice Service prolonged the

time until rearrest, perhaps highlighting the temporary deterrent impact of increased surveillance.

The remainder of this chapter attempts to situate this failure of the Youth Justice Service to facilitate positive, sustained behavioural change in clients. We focus on aspects of the Youth Justice Service policy and operational factors that underscored, and contributed to, this outcome.

### **Policy clarity and the importance of specifying a course for action**

At their most generic level, public policies refer to decisions made by governments. One of the more precise definitions is offered by Jenkins (1978), who defines public policy as:

a set of interrelated decisions taken by a political actor or group of actors concerning the selection of goals and the means of achieving them within a specified situation where those decisions should, in principle, be within the power of those actors to achieve

Jenkins, 1978, p. 15.

While policy decisions that are made within the clinical or researcher-controlled environment can develop, to some extent at least, in isolation from the broader programming environment, decisions made within the government sphere must consider a far greater number of interests and contingencies. Consequently, despite the push for policy-making that is deliberate, calculated and has clear foundations in evidence, in reality rational policy decisions are difficult to achieve in the face of

competing interests, administrative structures, and social and political factors. In arriving at a policy decision, bureaucrats must shape and filter these contingencies, distorting (intentionally or inadvertently) the original policy intent.

The analysis of the Youth Justice Service policy revealed six primary goals and seven goals that applied on a broader level. These, as they appeared in the policy directive, are outlined below.

#### *Primary Goals*

1. Identify the issues contributing to the offending behaviour;
2. Identify the most appropriate interventions;
3. Implement an intervention strategy targeting the offending behaviour;
4. Monitor participation and compliance with order requirements;
5. Target the offending behaviour; and
6. Address the support and lifestyle needs.

#### *Broader Goals*

1. Divert the young person from further involvement in the juvenile justice system;
2. Reduce the extent of serious and recidivist offending;
3. Increase community confidence in the juvenile justice system;
4. Increase the target population's positive reintegration into the community;
5. Increase successful completion of juvenile justice orders and conditional bail programs;

6. Contribute to the reduction of the over-representation of Indigenous young people in the youth justice system, particularly detention; and
7. Engage community participation.

A number of observations should be made about these goals, many of which can effectively be discussed under the broad concept of *goal ambiguity* (Chun & Rainey, 2005; Feldman, 1989; Kelemen, 2000). Defined as the extent to which an organisational goal or set of goals allows leeway for interpretation, when the organisational goal represents the desired future state of the organisation, this ambiguity results in serious dysfunctional consequences and is one of the most distinctive characteristics of public organisations (Chun & Rainey, 2005, pp. 1-2). Chun and Rainey have conceptualised goal ambiguity as consisting of four constructs: (1) mission comprehension ambiguity; (2) priority goal ambiguity; (3) evaluative goal ambiguity; and (4) directive goal ambiguity.

#### *Mission comprehension ambiguity*

This refers to the clarity of the organisation's mission; what is it that the organisation seeks to achieve? From the extensive list of goals it was difficult to formulate a succinct statement of the organisation's intent. Even when the six primary goals were synthesised into two overriding goals – (1) work with the offender to address their offending behaviour, and (2) monitor the offender's compliance with court orders – staff had difficulty reconciling these two objectives.

#### *Priority goal ambiguity*



This refers to the level of interpretive leeway in deciding on priorities among multiple goals (Chun & Rainey, 2005, p. 4). The two overriding goals of the Youth Justice Service are quite distinct: one seeks to ensure compliance with community court orders, the other to engage the clients toward addressing offending behaviour. Evidence from the case study suggested that both staff and clients had difficulty reconciling these two goals. Caseworkers indicated that their primary focus was to ensure that their statutory obligations to monitor order compliance were met. Caseworkers considered working with clients to address offending behaviour as “extra” and noted that this work would only occur once all statutory duties had been completed. Clients, on the other hand, did not want to open up to caseworkers who were also required to monitor their compliance with their order. One client summed this position up when he said, “Why would I want to talk about my offending with the person who can then go and breach me?”

Although not addressed in Chun and Rainey’s framework, it is doubtful whether the two overriding goals of the Youth Justice Service are complementary. Is it possible for a single service (predominantly a single caseworker) to work with a young offender towards positive behavioural change whilst simultaneously ensuring compliance with court imposed sanctions? Does this “probationer” role undermine the developmental role that seeks to encourage mutual trust and respect? According to alignment theory (Semler, 1997), the selection of the compliance goal as the key priority should not be unexpected. If the two overriding goals are in opposition, staff may find it difficult to effectively achieve both goals simultaneously. In this case,

staff efforts will necessarily be directed toward meeting statutory obligations, thus modifying the direction of the organisation.

### *Evaluative goal ambiguity*

Evaluative goal ambiguity refers to the level of interpretive leeway that an organisational mission allows in evaluating the progress toward the achievement of the mission (Chun & Rainey, 2005, p. 4). The Youth Justice Service policy does include a set of key performance indicators that prescribe the way in which the policy will be evaluated. Some of these measures are quite objective and leave little room for interpretation. For example, a reduction in the number and proportion of Indigenous young people in the youth justice system and a decrease in recidivism by clients of Youth Justice Services all involve quantitative measurement of established constructs. Others, such as a high level of participant satisfaction and increased confidence in government's response to youth crime in areas with Youth Justice Services, are vulnerable to subjective interpretation.

Despite the existence of key performance indicators, staff were generally uncertain as to how best to measure the success of the Youth Justice Service. The dominant perspective was that the success of the service could not be judged against a single set of predetermined client outcomes. These staff maintained that because the service is based on an assessment of individual needs, and that the needs of each client are unique, successes for each young person will be similarly unique. Consequently, any attempt to rank client outcomes against any predetermined criteria is inappropriate, and should not be used as an indicator of success or failure of the Youth Justice

Service. Staff who held this view tended to focus on very small, incremental successes, and had little regard to the broader impacts such as reoffending. “If a child turns around and says ‘thank you’, that’s a success because they might never have said it before.”

Other staff suggested that success could be measured in terms of the creation of opportunities that, if acted upon, put clients in a better position to alter their pathway. This point of view aligns with the Youth Justice Service policy, which lists improved access for young people to programs and services as a key performance indicator. It also aligns with the principles of developmental crime prevention. For these staff, these access routes typically involved integrating young people back into education and assisting them to gain practical work experience. A common theme here was to ensure that young people had established links with community agencies that would provide continued support once the official intervention of the Youth Justice Service had concluded.

Really practical things, like finishing grade ten or doing a course that will help them get a job, because their current reinforcement schedule is so powerful that you really need to put them into something they are ‘doing’.

Despite being a key performance indicator, staff did not consider that a reduction in offending behaviour was an appropriate measure of success. One staff member did indicate that measuring a reduction in offending was not appropriate in general and should only be used to assess service effectiveness with the subset of clients who have minor offending histories: “With the low end kids we are looking for them to not reoffend.”

### *Directive goal ambiguity*

This refers to the amount of interpretive leeway available in translating the organisation's goals into directives and guidelines for specific actions to be taken to accomplish the goals (Chun & Rainey, 2005, p. 3). There are a number of procedures in place that guide the process of compliance with court-imposed orders (e.g., breaching procedures). However, comparatively little guidance accompanied the goal of engaging young people to address their offending behaviour.

This kind of ambiguity, on top of the other forms discussed, helps to explain why the Youth Justice Service policy presented ample opportunity to be distorted on the ground. The remainder of the chapter examines how this ambiguous policy platform flowed through to influence service delivery in negative ways.

### **Commitment, capacity, communication and conflict: how operational factors can distort practice on the ground**

Despite the fact that four out of the five primary goals of the Youth Justice Service policy were directed at addressing offending behaviour, caseworkers indicated that they turned their attention to issues contributing to offending behaviour only when all matters of compliance had been addressed.

We have the statutory requirement to get them through the minimum, be it probation or the hours they have to do for community service. Anything

else is of course additional, and that is something like going back to school. That's the "extra".

Notwithstanding the fact that caseworkers indicated that the statutory basis of the court order *legally* had to be prioritised – in essence, through no fault of their own – the research identified several other factors that also supported the prioritisation of the compliance role.

### *Commitment*

Caseworkers generally had little faith that discussions relating to their offending behaviour would bring about positive behavioural change in their clients. They argued that their efforts were futile when a client was not "ready to change," and had little confidence in their ability to move clients to this point. Further, where clients demonstrated evidence of moving to a more positive pathway, caseworkers attributed this change to an external event such as getting a girlfriend or a job, not to any process related to themselves or the Youth Justice Service. In assuming this position, caseworkers evaded any personal responsibility for ensuring positive client outcomes, shifting this burden to the client. It is understandable therefore that caseworkers focused their attentions on compliance, where they could see immediate and tangible results.

In the end it is up to the young people as to whether they engage with us.

Unless the kids are in the mindset to change, I don't think we have much hope.

This lack of confidence in being able to bring about positive behavioural change may also be reflected in caseworkers' opinions on appropriate measures of success. Their reluctance to subscribe to any global outcome measures can be at least partially rationalised through an adherence to an “individualised treatment and outcomes” model.

### *Capacity*

Another reason for prioritising the compliance goal may lie in the fact that successfully engaging clients to address their offending behaviour is very difficult to accomplish. The activity is made even more difficult when you doubt your ability in the first instance, do not fully understand developmental processes or techniques of behaviour modification, have few tools at your disposal to guide you through the process, have little experience in dealing with young people and their families, and have few opportunities for professional development.

Successfully engaging young people requires knowledge of developmental processes and significant experience in engaging with young people. Youth Justice Service clients are typically high-end offenders who have extensive offending histories and know how to negotiate the juvenile justice system and manipulate inexperienced caseworkers. The majority of Youth Justice Service caseworkers interviewed acknowledged that their understanding of techniques to successfully engage with their clients was underdeveloped. The appropriate skill base required for this role was also raised in interviews, specifically concerning whether a therapeutic or social work approach was optimal.

Most people here have a social work background, which doesn't have a therapeutic focus, and that's why people struggle to have meaningful interactions.

While caseworkers were provided with a basic needs assessment tool, there was a tendency to adopt a "checklist approach" to intervention that inquired into needs that are typical to many young people, such as education and employment. Caseworkers indicated that their case management techniques become learned and that they didn't have sufficient time to reflect on practices toward developing new and innovative strategies for working with clients.

If you've got a really difficult case, something you haven't come across before, I might ask someone, but often I've got this tunnel thing going on and your practices become learned. We often get caught up in doing the same thing.

Although there is a well-developed rationale that focuses on parents or family when dealing with younger children (e.g., the Montreal Longitudinal-Experimental Study: McCord, Satz Widon, & Crowell, 2001), a newer body of evidence has emerged which suggests that intervention with the family is also critical in preventing the escalation of antisocial behaviour during adolescence (Chamberlain & Moore, 1998; Chamberlain & Reid, 1998; Latimer et al., 2003; Sherman et al., 1998). The Youth Justice Service policy embraced this concept and specified "family" as a key social context contributing to offending behaviour. Despite this, operational factors prevented caseworkers from working proactively with families. Given that clients are minors, parents and guardians were routinely contacted regarding case management

decisions. However, communication with parents and guardians rarely extended beyond contact to provide information. Caseworkers provided three major reasons for failing to work with families, despite acknowledging the role of the family in sustaining offending behaviour and being a critical target for change.

First, caseworkers argued that engaging families and working to address the family's needs fall outside the legislative ambit of the Youth Justice Service. Under the *Juvenile Justice Act 1992*, the Youth Justice Service is able to work with young offenders and has no legislative basis upon which to base intervention with families. This is clearly evidence of a misalignment between a policy and the underlying legislative structures upon which it is based.

We have a responsibility to keep the parents involved until the client is 18 because they are a child. We'll keep the parents informed of what is going on but our focus is squarely on the child.

The second reason is more concerning from a developmental crime prevention perspective. Caseworkers highlighted the fact that the Youth Justice Service is not a welfare agency, so should not be concerned with the short- or long-term welfare needs of the clients or their families. While caseworkers can, and do, direct families to community agencies to seek help for problems they may be experiencing, they do not routinely follow up on these referrals or make additional efforts to intervene with family-based issues: "We're not welfare workers. I wouldn't take on the family's issues myself."



Finally, the caseworkers suggested that their general inexperience was a significant factor in failing to work with the families of clients. The mean age of caseworkers was 25 years, and caseworkers questioned whether they had the appropriate life experience or skills to deal effectively with the complex problems experienced by families.

The youth of staff is a hindrance in terms of experience. All of us have limited experience just because we've only been working for a few years. So that has its limitations in not being able to draw on a vast amount of experience in what works well with clients. It is also difficult working with families.

Caseworkers were also given little opportunity for professional development. This means that all of the weaknesses that caseworkers identify, such as lack of innovative case management practices, an underdeveloped understanding of effective techniques to engage with young people and their families, poor time management skills and the inability to strike an effective balance between statutory and non-statutory demands have little potential to be addressed.

### *Communication and conflict*

The Youth Justice Service functions as two distinct teams: the casework team and the program team. Caseworkers are responsible for determining the needs of the offender, setting in motion a series of interventions, and monitoring compliance. The program work group has two major responsibilities: to develop and deliver programs to clients, and community engagement.

This organisational structure has led to poor communication and significant underlying conflict between the two teams, both of which have negatively influenced client outcomes. A number of factors appear to contribute to the conflict between the two teams. First, there was a level of resentment over perceived unequal workloads. The work of the program team was more elective and a significant proportion of their role was to develop relationships with service providers and the community in general. Consequently, the program team had to work much harder to provide tangible evidence of their contribution when compared with the caseworkers whose roles are heavily regulated by the court process.

Secondly, caseworkers wanted to retain complete control to ensure they were accountable and protected legally. Their reluctance to refer their clients to the program team was further reinforced by the poor communication between the two teams. Caseworkers had little confidence that the case notes made by program staff accurately represented the reality of their interactions with clients. The resulting resentment intensified the physical and role disconnection that already existed between the two work groups.

It is about not necessarily knowing what the program people do with our clients and therefore a reluctance to get the program people involved. I guess I wonder what they do.

As a result of the organisational friction that existed between the two work groups, the treatment model that evolved was focused around a single caseworker, as opposed to the collaborative, team-based model that evidence suggests is more effective with young people and was prescribed in the Youth Justice Service policy. This isolated

treatment model allowed for little cross-fertilisation regarding innovative strategies to address offending behaviour. Failing to access the expertise of the program team further reinforced the tendency of caseworkers to use learned case management practices and to treat apparently “similar” clients in a similar fashion. While there is some degree of consistency among the general issues facing young people (for example accessing education and employment) the way that each young person responds to intervention requires an individual treatment response, regardless of broadly similar risk factors.

## **Conclusion**

The failure of the Youth Justice Service to help young offenders to develop prosocial pathways can be attributed to both policy and service delivery factors. The ambiguous nature of the Youth Justice Service policy meant that the goals of the policy were vulnerable to interpretation and prioritisation. Given that the responsibility of ensuring statutory compliance with court orders and addressing offending behaviour resides within a single individual, and that the competence of most staff in the areas of human development and behaviour modification was limited, prioritisation of the comparatively easier, legal goal was an obvious outcome. Staff may prefer to focus their attention on an activity where they can demonstrate clear and positive results.

The failure to manualise the treatment model also meant that caseworkers were able to manipulate the Youth Justice Service policy to adopt a case management process that centred on a single caseworker, as opposed to the collaborative, team-based model espoused in the policy directive. Such an isolated treatment approach appears to be aligned with the skills and experience of caseworkers and allows them to retain

total control over case management. It is also a product of a divisive organisational structure that fostered internal conflict and mistrust.

Clearly, the developmental crime prevention focus of the Youth Justice Service policy got lost in translation. Paramount in this failure was its prioritisation of its compliance function over its goal to address offending behaviour. While this prioritisation is understandable, such an organisational focus meant that in the end there was little to differentiate the Youth Justice Service from a probation service. The pressure to effectively balance compliance and treatment could have been alleviated simply by relieving caseworkers of the compliance function. This delineation would also have helped clients to engage with caseworkers without fear of being breached.

Where genuine casework did occur, a number of failings were identified, including:

1. Case management practices became learned and were not tailored to the specific needs of young offenders;
2. Critical targets of intervention, such as families, were not included in the treatment approach, so any potential gains were likely to be eroded when the clients returned to their everyday environments; and
3. In general, staff were ill-equipped to manage effectively the complex problems presented by clients.

What this research indicates is the need for increased focus on the process of implementation; how can we effectively translate developmental theory and crime prevention to the real world context? A more rigorous policy directive, manualised treatment protocols, professional development and ongoing access to expert advice,

and organisational structures that support rather than undermine the goals of the policy appear critical to ensuring fidelity with the intent of the original policy. The importance of these factors is further highlighted when the interventions are run by government agencies that are also responsible for ensuring compliance with court orders. In this context, legal imperatives will always win out when additional goals are not adequately provided for in policy and service delivery.

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