CONFERENCE PAPER:

Risk/Needs assessment and response to criminogenic factors with young people

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Young People, Crime and Community Safety: engagement and early intervention

INTRODUCTION


For youth justice staff, risk and needs assessment means a tool we developed called the Victorian Offending Needs Indicator for Youth (VONIY). These ‘needs’ that impact on reoffending risk are called ‘criminogenic factors’. How we respond to needs identified through this assessment process is how we contribute to reducing a young person’s risk of reoffending. Our programmatic response to working with young people now includes CHART, which stands for Changing Habits And Reaching Targets. These two developments – the VONIY and CHART – are my topics today.

In understanding the term ‘rehabilitation’ as applied to young offenders, our work in Victoria is based on two approaches:

1. the body of research evidence known as ‘What Works’ in effective correctional programming for the rehabilitation of offenders, for example, challenging offenders’ thinking, the development of skills and motivation, targeting pathways to offending – also known as ‘criminogenic needs’, and

2. the relational process by which rehabilitation occurs is also understood as social integration and restoration, such as, practical help in accessing accommodation, education, training and employment, and using staff’s motivational, pro-social and personal skills to build on the relational potential of their case management role, including negotiated consent for a collaborative and contractual style of work.

While the tools of the VONIY and CHART are firmly based on the research evidence of ‘What Works’, it is staff realising the relational potential in their casework that will best help young offenders lead law-abiding lives.
REHABILITATION REVIEW


The Rehabilitation Review focused on the key principles of the ‘What Works’ approach to effective offender rehabilitation, that is, risk, needs, responsivity, program integrity and professional discretion, which are described in Table 1.

**Table 1: ‘What Works’ Principles of Good Practice**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PRINCIPLES</th>
<th>APPLICATION</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Risk</strong></td>
<td>Higher risk clients benefit the most from specialist services designed to</td>
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<td>reduce the level of risk, compared to lower risk clients who are more</td>
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<td>likely to desist from offending without intensive service involvement.</td>
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<td><strong>Needs</strong></td>
<td>Intervention services should target criminogenic needs. These needs are</td>
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<td>problem areas that contribute to or support offending and if changed,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>reduce criminal behaviour e.g. attitudes and beliefs supporting offending,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>antisocial peer associations, substance abuse, unstable accommodation and</td>
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<td></td>
<td>social supports, lack of educational and vocational supports, poor self-</td>
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<td></td>
<td>management and problem-solving.</td>
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<td><strong>Responsivity</strong></td>
<td>Services are matched to developmental needs, circumstances, motivation</td>
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<td></td>
<td>and learning styles of the offender.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Program Integrity</strong></td>
<td>Best practice intervention programs build in integrity monitoring as a</td>
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<td></td>
<td>routine part of service delivery to ensure that practice matches up with</td>
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<td></td>
<td>theory and program design.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Professional Discretion</strong></td>
<td>Allows scope for professional judgement on the basis of other</td>
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<td></td>
<td>characteristics and situations not covered by the above principles.</td>
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The Review found that:

“Underpinning any co-ordinated system of intervention program delivery is the accurate identification of offender needs at the point of entry to the system, a needs-focussed case management system, and a mechanism for determining whether targeted needs are showing evidence of change in the desired direction ... The adoption of an assessment
Implementing the Rehabilitation Review is being undertaken in three stages:
1. Development of the risk/needs tool for case management – the VONIY
2. Development of the case intervention framework – includes CHART
3. Ongoing development and evaluation.

DEVELOPING THE TOOL

Ten years ago, we began to reshape our case planning framework in line with the principles of risk, need and responsivity. A Risk And Needs Tool – the RANT – was developed but it was not linked to intervention levels and not well tied to case management and planning processes. Using the Rehabilitation Review consultants’ expertise, an analysis of risk/needs measures was provided to set us on our way.

The Youth Justice Program Development Unit then undertook the research, analysis and drafting of a tool and presented it to the Reference Group and Working Group. The role of the Reference Group was to own, endorse, promote and reinforce the tool; the Working Group’s role was to own, be the Subject Matter Experts and champions for the tool.

We knew we wanted a tool that was appropriate for Victoria’s strongly diversionary system; a tool that discriminated amongst the young offenders at the higher-end of the offending spectrum who are supervised by Youth Justice. The developmental process involved much discussion amongst Reference and Working Group members – about the concept of risk assessments, their purpose, timing and use of them, and the risk involved in assigning scores to young people and how that would be used. We deliberately chose to highlight the needs of the young person, rather than focus on risk, which is reflected in the name of the tool – the Victorian Needs Indicator for Youth (VONIY).

We also wanted to profile or build a picture of our client that captured protective factors, was responsive to special needs, and indicated current offence-related factors. A critical issue was to address the adolescent developmental changes associated with our clients’ wide age range from 10 to 21 years. Our imperative was to keep the tool tight with the inclusion of only relevant domains and items, and be consistent with other risk/needs tools. Descriptors for each item were developed and checked for inconsistencies in interpretation.

The Reference Group reviewed the work in progress and the Working Group of senior practitioners brought their practice wisdom to the development of the tool, debating over
FIT WITH CASE MANAGEMENT

Experience had taught us that the tool had to fit with a planned case management system; the earlier RANT tool had been developed in isolation. This tool was to be embedded in the Client Assessment and Planning (CAP) process, with assessment outcomes directing casework at an appropriate intervention level, with individual criminogenic needs targeted (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Client Assessment and Planning (CAP) Process

The purpose of the VONIY is applied in our youth justice system as follows:
- To profile the client and their needs
- To organise information in an evidence-based way, still allowing for individual differences
- To provide an individual, regional/custodial and statewide profile of youth justice clients
- To inform client service planning and to enhance case practice.
THE VICTORIAN OFFENDING NEEDS INDICATOR FOR YOUTH (VONIY)

To build an individual profile of each client, the VONIY is in four parts:
1. Youth Offending
2. Protective Factors
3. Special Needs, and
4. Offence-Related Factors.

All four parts of the VONIY are completed fully and accurately using the descriptor guidelines. The first part, Youth Offending, covers the following seven areas of risk and criminogenic needs:
1. Offending Profile
2. Family Circumstances
3. Accommodation and Finance
4. Substance Use
5. Education, Training and Employment
6. Peer Relationships and Community Linkages
7. Attitudes and Behaviours.

The total score from Youth Offending gives an overall indicator of the Level of Intervention required to address the young person’s offending needs and appropriate to that young person’s risk of reoffending, ranging from low, moderate, high, to intensive intervention (see Figure 2). Particular areas that score high in Youth Offending indicate high need and provide individually tailored targets for intervention.

**Figure 2: Age-appropriate Scales**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INTERVENTION LEVEL INDICATED</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>LOW</strong></td>
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<td>0 … to ... 10</td>
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For clients aged 15-20 years at time of current offence, use this scale -

For clients aged 10-14 years at time of current offence, use this scale -

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<th>MODERATE</th>
<th>HIGH</th>
<th>INTENSIVE</th>
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<td>0 … to ... 13</td>
<td>14 … to ... 28</td>
<td>29 … to ... 40</td>
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As shown by the scaling in Figure 2, a distinction is made between 10 to 14 year-old clients and 15 to 20 year-olds when the Youth Offending total score is matched to an intervention level. The scale for 10 to 14 year-olds does not include a Low Intervention Level due to the higher risk and needs that early entry into the criminal justice system indicates. Two scales were recommended by the University of South Australia following the pilot, based on a distinction between:

- ‘Life-course persistent’ offenders – their exposure to multiple risk factors is evident from an early age and is more likely to lead to persistent, serious and violent crime, and
- ‘Adolescence-limited’ offenders – their exposure to risk factors may become apparent at a later age and they are more likely to desist from offending.

Rather than being independent of each other, intervention levels are regarded as cumulative, with sentence administration as a baseline for all clients (see Figure 3). A Low Intervention Level is based on few identified criminogenic needs. Basic social and health needs are then met as required for those needing a Moderate Level of service provision. Clients whose offending needs are higher receive additional programs focusing on areas of criminogenic need and/or intensive forms of specialist programming.

The second part of the VONIY is Protective Factors, which is for information only as there is not yet a research basis to establish the exact relationship between protective factors and reoffending risk. However, research has identified a range of factors that are ‘protective’ in the sense that they moderate the effects of exposure to risk for offending.
Although the interaction between factors is uncertain, it is clear that risk factors cluster together in the lives of disadvantaged children and the likelihood of antisocial behaviour increases as the number of risk factors increases\textsuperscript{1}. It is also clear that different risk and protective factors become significant at different times in young people’s development.

In the VONIY, factors that protect against involvement in youth crime are grouped into three domains: individual, family and community. Protective factors provide useful information for casework to build on by identifying strengths and positives in the young person’s life. Conversely, the lack of protective factors can indicate major welfare concerns and social disconnection.

The third part of the VONIY, \textbf{Special Needs}, identifies characteristics or issues which require a response tailored to particular needs or may require referral for specialist assessment. It is designed to cover the ‘Responsivity Principle’ of the ‘What Works’ approach to offender rehabilitation. Responsivity factors are contextual variables that may influence the treatment outcome, for example, the age and developmental stage of a young person are critical to how interventions are delivered, or if the young person is Aboriginal or from a CALD background, service response should be culturally sensitive and delivered in a culturally competent way.

This third part covers Special Needs Groups, such as 10 to 14 year olds and Child Protection clients, and Health and Developmental Needs. These are concerns to flag, for example, as an issue \textit{to be aware of} (e.g. client appears to be developmentally emotionally delayed, or client has epilepsy and takes medication) or as an issue \textit{for follow-up} (e.g. may be self-harming).

Finally, the fourth part is \textbf{Offence-Related Factors}. This examines offending related to the client’s current order to provide a thumb-nail sketch of key issues in ‘real-time’, that is, to give more immediacy to the client picture, including whether offending has increased in severity/seriousness and/or frequency. Other key issues include the young person’s attitude regarding their accountability and victim awareness, and skill deficits affecting rehabilitation.

Information from the VONIY is then used to build an evidence-based, individual profile of the young person in the written \textbf{Assessment Summary}. The summary translates the VONIY form into an accessible, readable report and covers: offence/s and order type; intervention level and key areas of need; protective factors; special needs; offence-

\textsuperscript{1} This notation is based on ‘Risk and protective factors associated with youth crime and effective interventions to prevent it’, Youth Justice Board Research Note No. 5, Youth Justice Board for England and Wales, November 2001, p.116, and see Risk and Protective Factors (Summary), Youth Justice Board 2005 at \url{www.yjb.gov.uk/publications} > assessment
related factors; intervention targets; strategies, agencies, referrals and special conditions; other current issues or professional considerations; a custodial review summary. The most important targets for intervention are prioritized based on the high areas of need identified in Youth Offending. Other current issues may include the young person’s level of motivation, their capacity to complete the order unless supports are in place, and any special conditions, for example, to attend specialist interventions.

In some cases, the nature of the offence requires an intensive level of intervention, even when the client scores low in Youth Offending, for example, sex offences and offences resulting in death. There may also be occasions where the case manager is aware of significant emerging issues for the client, that are not adequately reflected in the offending profile and which would suggest a different level of intervention. In such cases, the use of professional judgement to recommend a different level of intervention is required and is recorded and approved in the Assessment Summary.

While the VONIY informs and structures the Assessment Summary, staff input provides meaning. Critically, this is understanding and relating information to the client’s current and future situation, such as, the length of the young person’s history in the youth justice system, whether drug use is escalating, or if the young person is reluctant to address issues and access community help.

As part of the Client Assessment and Planning (CAP) process, the Assessment Summary is linked to the Client Service Plan (CSP). This is a straight-forward, collaborative agreement between the client and case manager, with the “goals/issues” and actions in the CSP directly addressing the key criminogenic needs, offending and protective issues identified in the Assessment Summary. The CSP is a way of supporting clients to recognise issues, focus on solutions and set goals for change. While the young person should understand reoffending risk reduction as the primary purpose of the assessment and plan, the level of agreement on goals and strategies may be quite different and would be noted in the CSP.

**NEW RESPONSE TO CRIMINOGENIC FACTORS: CHART**

As a system, the Victorian Youth Justice response to criminogenic factors is via the four-level Framework for Rehabilitation previously outlined. The client’s individual profile in the VONIY of criminogenic needs is linked to a level of intervention. It is for the Moderate and High Intervention Levels that a new programmatic response has been developed for Youth Justice. This new program is called CHART - Changing Habits And Reaching Targets.
CHART is based on key findings from the ‘What Works’ research – that it is possible to devise interventions with young offenders in a way that will reduce their risk of reoffending, and certain features of programs increase the likelihood of achieving this goal and of increasing the extent of reduction in offending. Features of effective interventions are summarised in Table 2 (see the Victorian Juvenile Justice Rehabilitation Review, 2003\(^2\)). Table 3 shows that CHART is consistent with the principles of effective interventions.

### Table 2: Components of Effective Treatment Programs

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Indiscriminate targeting of treatment programs is counterproductive in reducing recidivism: medium-to-high risk offenders should be selected and programs should focus on criminogenic targets.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>The type of treatment program is important, with stronger evidence for structured behavioural and multi-modal approaches than for less focussed approaches.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>The most successful programs, while behavioural in nature, include a cognitive component to focus on attitudes and beliefs.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Treatment programs should be designed to engage high levels of offender responsivity.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Treatment programs conducted in the community have a stronger effect than residential programs. While residential programs can be effective, they should be linked structurally with community-based interventions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>The most effective programs have high treatment integrity in that they are carried out by trained staff and the treatment initiators are involved in all the operational phases of the treatment programs.</td>
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### Table 3: Components for Effectiveness of CHART

- Based on a sound conceptual and theoretical framework that provides a clear rationale for the application of methods and is supported by empirical research (social learning/cognitive-behavioural)
- Targets moderate to high risk offenders
- Focussed on criminogenic needs
- Responsive to and congruent with the learning styles of most young offenders (active, participatory)
- Uses a planned, structured and cognitive-behavioural approach; is multi-modal and skills-oriented
- High intervention integrity when the ingredients of the program are delivered as planned by trained staff
- Multiple components that recognise the spectrum of difficulties encountered by young offenders that may be conducive to crime.

Furthermore, it is important to better understand the process of change and the mechanisms that support change in offender rehabilitation programs (Day, Bryan, Davey & Casey, 2006\(^3\)). Techniques for offender rehabilitation programs to be more effective in bringing about change include:

- Being mindful of the sequence of components of programs
- The development of preparation or readiness to change – increasing motivation

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\(^2\) www.dhs.vic.gov.au/youthjustice  
• Rendering the *offence process explicit* – such as working through the offence in CBT detail and narrative
• Desistance is encouraged when offenders believe they are the *agents of their pro-social change*
• Offer a broad *suite of programs."

**OFFENCE-SPECIFIC PROGRAMMING**

The CHART program is designed with this change process in mind and to be a practical tool for youth justice staff to use in casework with clients as an evidence-based behaviour change program. The guiding principle is that the client’s offending behaviour should be the prime focus of work undertaken with him or her.

CHART was developed by Felicity Dunne, a forensic and clinical psychologist, with the support of a DHS reference group. It is a sequential, structured, modular program that:

• employs a skills-oriented, cognitive-behavioural focus
• is clearly directive in its approach to intervention and
• uses active, participatory learning methods.

The message to youth justice staff is that CHART is not just a program but is also a *way of working*. Staff are trained to use the modular program as part of casework with clients. By using the manual, CHART provides a way for staff to have conversations with clients that are focussed on offending and to work through modules and worksheets that are presented in a visually appealing and adolescent-appropriate format. Staff adopt an interactive, problem-solving and participatory style so that clients feel engaged in acquiring skills for self-directed change - that they can be their own agent for change.

CHART’s modular structure consists of six core and six discretionary modules. The core modules are delivered in full, in sequence, as a structured intervention, followed by the delivery of discretionary modules as appropriate for the client to address particular offence-specific behaviours and offence-related needs. Client achievement is concretely and visibly reinforced with the completion of each worksheet and by certificates for CHART core program completion and for each discretionary module.

Modules are structured into discrete sessions, each of approximately 30 minutes duration. For example, the first core module called ‘Mapping My Offences’ contains a session called ‘Making the Map’, which helps clients explore the pathways that led up to their offence. Worksheets for this session include ‘Starting to Think About my Offences’, which is a questionnaire-style checklist and a conversation starter, and ‘My Map’, which provides a structured and enjoyable method of examining an offence related to the
client’s current order, asking the five W’s – who, when, where, what and why. It is through such methods that the program assists clients to understand beliefs that are supportive of offending behaviour, to re-examine their motives and re-evaluate the potential consequences of their actions, as well as develop the skills to find new directions.

Figure 4: Changing Habits And Reaching Targets (CHART) poster

CONCLUSION

Working towards the rehabilitation of young offenders is continually evolving. This presentation has outlined part of that evolution in Victoria. Our developmental work has now carried over to other Australian jurisdictions, with the VONIY adopted in Western Australia in 2007 and planned for the Australian Capital Territory in 2008, as well as CHART being rolled out in the ACT and Queensland in 2008.