Youth Training Centres System

Community Services Victoria operates four youth training centres for young male and female offenders between the ages of 15 and 21 years. Their functions are as follows:

- Turana: youth training centre for 15 to 17 year old males; remand centre for 15 to 17-year-old males; classification centre for 17 to 21-year-old males.
- Winlaton: youth training centre for 15 to 17-year-old females; remand centre for 15 to 17-year-old females; youth training centre for 17 to 21-year-old females; remand centre for guardianship 10 to 17 years.
- Malmsbury: (adult) youth training centre for 17 to 21-year-old males.
- Langi Kal Kal: (adult) youth training centre for 17 to 21-year-old males.

Youth training centres for 15 to 17-year-olds receive young people who receive sentences from the Children’s Court, while the (adult) youth training centres receive 17 to 21-year-olds who receive sentences from the adult courts as an alternative to imprisonment. This latter situation is termed the ‘dual track’ system and is unique to Victoria. Essentially, young offenders receive a Children’s Court disposition rather than a prison sentence from the adult court.

Males aged 17 to 21 are classified at Turana prior to being transferred to Malmsbury or Langi Kal Kal and, at present, some young people sentenced to Turana transfer to Malmsbury and Langi Kal Kal after reaching 17 years.

* This paper was correct at time of writing (March 1990). Changes to the Victorian System have subsequently been made—call 03-4127310 for details.
* The views are those of the author and not necessarily those of Community Services Victoria.
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Trainee numbers

The approximate number of trainees at each youth training centre (YTC) at any point in time is shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Approximate Number of Trainees at each Youth Training Centre at any one time

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Children's Court</th>
<th>Adult Court</th>
<th>Remand Court</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Turana</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winlaton</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malmsbury</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Langi Kal Kal</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>75</strong></td>
<td><strong>145</strong></td>
<td><strong>25</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Trainee characteristics

Trainees in Victorian YTCs are probably not too different from other young offenders elsewhere. The following characteristics were obtained from a recent census of YTC trainees (Youth Support Branch 1989):

- 36 per cent offended under the influence of alcohol;
- 40-50 per cent offended to obtain alcohol/drugs;
- 50 per cent were unemployed at the time of the offence;
- 75 per cent came from families where death, separation, divorce, and/or remarriage had occurred;
- 75 per cent had education levels of Year 9 or less; and
- 40 per cent had completed Year 8 or less.

While some care has to be taken with these statistics because of 'self report' errors, they are indicative of the kinds of young people at youth training centres in Victoria.

It also should be noted that because of the community based hierarchy in Victoria, the Youth Training Centres only see the young person who has penetrated the incarceration system—the most damaged and most hardened. Also seen are those adult young people aged 17 to 21 years who have left the adult community based system due to breaches, for example.
Objectives of Youth Training Centre

The relevant legislation establishing YTCs does not specify the objectives of the YTC system. However, the following list of objectives is seen as a guide to the thinking and actions of Youth Support Branch in developing and operating youth training centres.

- To purposefully detain young people sentenced to a period of detention in a youth training centre;
- to assist young people so detained to cope with their dysfunctions and resolve their conflict with society;
- to experience positive social and emotional development and rehabilitation generally in a 'normalised' and caring setting;
- to enhance the life opportunities, circumstances and skills of young persons so detained;
- to minimise the chances of penetration further into the welfare, juvenile justice and correctional systems;
- to maximise the young person's chances of successful re-integration into society including family reintegration.

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Strategies

Keeping in mind the objectives listed previously, the strategies focused upon in Victorian YTCs can be summarised as:

- improving the self-concept and esteem of each trainee;
- improving the trainee's capacity to cope with life after YTCs;
- changing the trainee's outside environment and/or their responses to their environment;
- reducing substance abuse/use.

If these strategies could be successfully implemented, many young people who pass through YTCs would be kept out of prison.

YTCs are a complex field requiring dedicated resources for staffing, staff development, facilities, programming and so on. In many of the past 20 or 30 years, these resources have not been forthcoming, resulting in a system that requires quite systematic and dedicated actions to make it appropriate for modern day philosophy and expectation. And, more importantly, to reduce the incidence of young people leaving it, to eventually enter prison.
Developing self-concept and self-esteem

Central to the work of all YTCs is that of developing the self concept and self esteem of all trainees in the belief that they will:

• act more appropriately on their return rather than act out;
• minimise their dependence on drugs and alcohol;
• try to develop their contribution to the community; and
• see the benefits of being more successful in their relationships, leisure time and employment.

The key methods YTCs utilise in this area include:

• outward bound—'challenge' activities such as rock climbing, camps, treks;
• human relations activities, under the Health Access Program, where trainees are informed about the basis of their behaviour and personal development issues generally;
• group counselling;
• participation in the temporary leave program where trainees are 'trusted' to visit their families and meet the program's conditions such as returning on time;
• participating in programs and activities that lead to achievements on the part of trainees (sport, farming, leisure, vocational and craft).

One of the best outcomes from this area came from Malmsbury, where a trainee undertook the sailing program for the first time. He became so proficient, that on release he joined a prominent sailing club in Victoria. Not only did this give his self-esteem a boost, but it changed the young person's environment on parole.

One of the issues facing YTCs in this area of programming is that of finance. Suitable outdoor challenge programs are costly to mount and purchase. Accordingly, not all trainees get access to this activity. Over time, it is hoped that YTCs will assemble the equipment, locations and external contacts to ensure widespread participation. It is pleasing to note that Winlaton, our female YTC, also participates in outdoor programs; although their major approach to self-esteem development is through group counselling.

With respect to personal development issues covered by the Health Access Program, youth officers and trainees are exposed to skill acquisition and knowledge sessions covering a range of issues. These include:

• relationships and problem solving;
• sex roles;
• communication and assertiveness;
• values clarification;
• anger and stress management;
• risk taking and phases of adolescence.
Practical sessions are operated to impart these issues in a meaningful way. 'Tagged' workers within each facility are being trained to impart such material and skill to trainees.

**Improving the Capacity to Cope with Life after YTC**

Together with the Youth Parole Board, CSV places a high priority on trainees obtaining employment, either prior to their release on parole, or on release. It is felt that employment has a number of advantages for the trainee—thus the importance being placed upon sound vocational planning for all trainees.

CSV is working toward each trainee having a vocational plan that is developed by the allocated youth officer and the assigned employment access worker. Ideally, the plan should be established soon after the trainee arrives at the YTC and include where necessary components like credentialed vocational/TAFE training, remedial mainstream educational, career planning and 'work release'.

The importance of the role of education and vocational training has been recognised by both the Ministry of Education and CSV by the establishment of a joint Interdepartmental Committee (IDC) to improve all facets of education and training for trainees. In the past, there has been a tendency to rely on the early formulae of trade and vocational training and remedial education. It is now time to ensure that trainees obtain access to contemporary, relevant and interesting education and training to reduce further their chances of recidivism and deeper penetration into the justice system, that is, access to all opportunities that all other people obtain.

It is worth noting the important role the employment access program (EAP) workers play in this facet of YTC operations. By being regionally based—that is, in the community—the EAP worker can make links with the trainee and his/her parole officer once they are on parole in the community. Additionally, EAP workers aim for quality employment opportunities rather than 'bums on seats', thus ensuring that every opportunity is given to ensure trainees succeed on release.

Success at employment will have a large bearing on whether or not the trainee maintains his/her self-esteem and stays free of the law. Additionally, employment means income, which assists trainees in obtaining independent living—preferably away from the former influences leading to YTC sentencing.

While there is some concern about de-skilling of youth officers in our system by the employment of specialists such as employment access workers, having such skilled and specialist 'access' workers can provide the necessary information support, networks and rehabilitation to all of the players including the trainee, YTC youth officer, parole officer and significant others. Such contact can only improve the skills and knowledge of the other players. These specialists should not be confined to employment, but include:

- health;
- accommodation; and
- education.

Another focus of CSV at present within the YTC system, is that of health. When you look at some of the characteristics listed earlier, particularly those related to substance use, health is the threshold issue facing YTCs—staff and trainees alike. Whether it be diet, substance abuse, HIV infection, sexuality, basic medical, or mental disturbance, any one of
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these issues (or a constellation as is usually the case), can determine whether the trainee will return again or enter prison.

Unfortunately, health issues are the hardest to deal with, mainly because of their complexity, cost, elusiveness and extent. Additionally, organisations have tended not to respond as quickly as they might have in terms of:

- staff training;
- expert care and treatment;
- provision of community based support;
- information and advice.

CSV is currently engaged in the following health related activities:

- development of ‘health’ plans at all YTCs to ensure an integrated approach to health issues is taken based upon a thorough analysis and audit of existing gaps;

- formulation of a Young Offender Health Board/Interdepartmental Committee between Health Department of Victoria and CSV along similar lines to the very successful Office of Corrections Health Board in Victoria;

- submission to the Victorian Drug Research and Rehabilitation Fund for four Health and Drug Access workers to ensure that health issues—particularly drug issues—receive more systematic attention and support;

- continuation of the Health Access Program for the delivery of training, information and support to trainees and staff alike in areas such as, personal development, infection control, substance use and abuse, and sexuality;

- upgrading of orientation and in-service training to include relevant health issues;

- introduction of contemporary instructions, policy and practice for infection control—particularly in the areas of HIV and Hepatitis B;

- production and distribution of a manual on drug issues for staff called Opening Doors (Youth Support Branch 1989).

The health issue is important in determining whether a young person makes a life of crime or breaks the cycle. As young people are in custody for relatively long periods (6-12 months), there is an excellent opportunity to improve all aspects of their health. For example, sexuality issues relating to contraception/parenting, sexual violence, infection control, and substance use and abuse.
Changing the Trainee's Environment

It is not enough to change an individual's behaviour and expect to have a successful, rehabilitation process and one that lasts. It is necessary to change the individual's environment or their interaction with their environment.

It is no use having the trainee undergo a drug rehabilitation program or a vocational course and then have him/her return to a completely dysfunctional family or law breaking peer group involved in drug taking and pushing, for example.

This is an extremely important area for keeping young people out of prison. If they have just left a YTC on parole or on remission, there are not too many stops in the hierarchy to prison. The 15 to 17-year-olds probably would pass through an adult YTC prior to prison, but most 17 to 21-year-olds, if they continue to offend, go to prison after one to three stays at a YTC.

While parole officers are utilised extensively as a community-based resource/support for the parolee, more needs to be done to change the trainee's environment and the way he/she reacts to it.

Some of the approaches taken to improve this part of the jigsaw include:

- Forging closer links between the parole service and youth training centres for each trainee. This should ensure improved information exchange between all of the players and integration of the YTC and community-based components of the trainees' programs.

- Trainee familiarisation, whilst in the YTC, of the resources available in the community on return in the areas, for example, of needle exchange, sexuality counselling and family planning, substance use and abuse, employment—employment access worker, accommodation, and legal aid.

- A more disciplined temporary leave program.

While each trainee can be eligible for weekend leave, work release, health leave and special leave, improved planning and monitoring occurs with each leave taken. Youth officers check carefully the location of any leave taken and debrief the experience with the trainee.

Leave provides the opportunity for trainees to develop family and community relations that may have been strained in the past or not have existed. Objectives for individual leaves are set in conjunction with trainees. In some cases, conditions are attached to leave to ensure that trainees do not, for example, continue with drug/alcohol taking, meet with certain peers, return late or make contact with victims.

Finally, leave programs ensure that trainees maintain their links with the community to which they must return and not become isolated by the experience of incarceration.

A More Systematic Approach to Case Planning

While all YTCs operate a case planning system, it is believed that the present system can become more systematic over the coming year. The proposal is for the case planning system to have the following characteristics:

- commencement on arrival at the centre;
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- based upon a complete assessment and on all information known by CSV;
- known to all staff and the trainee and agreed by all;
- documented with objectives, timelines and review points;
- comprises key elements such as: career and employment; education, technical education; accommodation; health; recreation; family reunification; community reintegration; and special interests;
- resourced to the limits upon the centre;
- monitored and reviewed;
- linked to the YTC period with the parole period and beyond;
- responsibility rests with a designated youth officer for each trainee.

The introduction of the proposed system will take a fair degree of planning and consultation with staff. Staff training of course, will be a key element. It is believed that with systematic case planning, there will be a better chance of the trainee surviving the post YTC period without re-conviction.

YTC Staff

One of the key determinants of whether trainees re-enter the justice system is the effect and influence that staff have upon them. Direct care staff are the trainee's 'parents' for a large part of their time. If staff are experienced, caring, knowledgeable, understanding and committed, then many of the objectives will be met and strategies will be implemented effectively and efficiently.

Accordingly, staff issues should be considered. Excellence is required in the following areas:

- management and supervision—particularly first line;
- staff training at all levels;
- effective recruitment methods may broaden the chances of getting the best staff;
- sharp selection techniques that pinpoint the best staff member from the largest possible pool;
- clear policy and practice manuals;
- the necessary degree of discipline (for staff and trainees) including sanction;
- team building and morale;
- safety, security and occupational health;
- working and living environments for trainees and staff.

At a recent conference of managers, operators and policy makers of the state and territory juvenile justice systems, one of the topics that received the most attention was that
of staffing. Most states were concerned about staffing of institutions and thus it is a national problem that needs to be addressed. To conclude, the best insurance against recidivism is staff. That is why attention to the points listed above, plus a mix of specialists, is so important.

**Some Concluding Remarks**

To conclude, it seems that the Victorian direction is correct. However, there is an immense amount of work to be done to ensure the system is developed further to ensure the number of young people entering prisons is reduced.

There are a few other issues that will have an effect on our capacity to achieve our objectives which require thought. These include:

- Changing community attitudes to criminal acts that are committed by young people and the resultant law making by politicians, prosecuting behaviour of police, sentencing practices of courts, and the reaction of perpetrators, victims and staff;
- increasing accountability of public institutions for the (human) services they provide and the role of watchdog bodies and inquiries, for example, Muirhead Royal Commission, Burdekin Royal Commission, and the Jika Jika Coronial Inquiry;
- shrinking budgets in the public sector—particularly for low priority groups such as offenders;
- rising costs—such as salaries, operations, and subsidies—associated with providing meaningful and desired programs similar to those listed above. For example, a good in-house drug rehabilitation program is expensive;
- ageing facilities in a tight climate for capital works.

A commitment must be maintained to those who enter the system and an effort made to assist them to remain free of prisons (and YTCs).

**References**

Youth Support Branch 1989, Census results for Youth Training Centres and Statewide Correctional Supervision, 30 June, Community Services, Victoria.