

DEFINING YOUNG PEOPLE WITH COMPLEX NEEDS

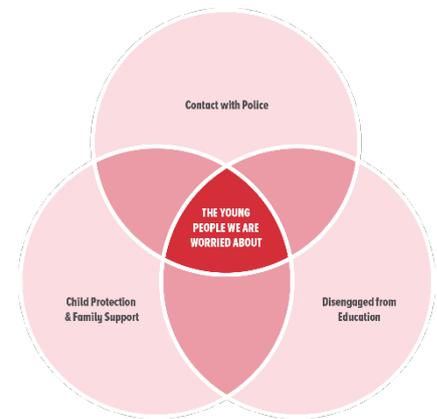
Background

The Armadale Youth Intervention Partnership (AYIP) identified that there is no consistent definition and/or process across Government departments for identifying young people at risk of juvenile offending or becoming Prolific Priority Offenders (PPO's). This creates a significant challenge in identifying the right young people which should be provided with targeted early support to prevent this trajectory. This proposed cross-departmental definition of young people at risk of entering the juvenile justice system will help ensure this partnership provides targeted support to the right young people.

Methodology

To support this the Youth Partnership Project (YPP) team undertook a desktop review and consultation process with key government departments, service providers and young people in order to develop an overarching definition of young people who have complex needs, creating a higher risk for them entering the juvenile justice system.

It was identified that the various government departments in Western Australia define 'at-risk' or 'complex needs' using varying indicators dependent on their department mandate. However, all definitions/indicators across departments contribute to factors that can lead to young people's engagement in juvenile offending. For example, the Department of Education identifies young people at risk based on specific absenteeism rates and behavioural problems¹; the Department of Child Protection and Family Support² has listed in their definition behavioural risks, situational risk (or family functioning) and poor education outcomes; and WA Police identify young people at risk based on relation or involvement with a PPO or their domestic situation is such that the child is at risk due to negative factors³. All of these definitions are aligned with literature of criminogenic needs, which is understood as dynamic risk factors which are directly correlated with recidivism.⁴ Moreover, the YPP team consulted with young people from Armadale with lived experience in the juvenile justice system and/or relation with someone who has lived experience.⁵ These young people identified risk factors or rather 'unmet needs' which lead to offending which can all be aligned with the governmental and theoretical definitions of youth at risk and/or young people with complex needs.



Young People with Complex Needs

Whilst there cannot be an 'absolute' definition and there is no 'formula' for a young person becoming a PPO, it is clear that some young people face challenging circumstances which puts them at a greater risk than others. The definition below has taken all of the above indicators and definitions in to consideration. It is the concurrence of these complex needs that place a young person in a situation of high vulnerability and increase their likelihood of displaying anti-social behaviours, and therefore, increase their probability of contact with the criminal justice system. Research often sites,^{6, 7, 8, 9} and empirical evidence indicates, that a young person's relation/association with a PPO/POI (person of interest) and poor family functioning are highly influential 'hard indicators'¹⁰. As such, it is proposed that:

AYIP defines young people at risk of entering the juvenile justice system as, young people aged between 10 and 14 years-old, who experience indicators 1 and 2 below, and any additional individual and situational risk factors listed.

	SITUATIONAL RISK FACTORS	INDIVIDUAL RISK FACTORS
HARD INDICATORS	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A young person who is or is related to and/or associating with a Prolific Priority Offender or Person of Interest. 2. A young person living in a conflicting home environment due to all or some of the following: domestic violence; family members have problems with alcohol and substance misuse; unemployed; homeless; socially disadvantaged; family breakdown; transient families; lower socio-economic families¹¹ 3. Street presence 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. A young person who has: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. School attendance rates below 59%,¹² and/or b. 8+ suspensions and/or a total of 30 days suspension, and/or c. Critical incidences, including physical assault or intimidating/threatening behaviour
SOFT INDICATORS	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Lack of recreational or positive leisure activities. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. A young person presents with mental health concerns e.g. depression, anxiety, conduct disorders and/or alcohol and substance abuse 7. A young person who, if at school, is <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Not coping in classroom situations; b. Showing signs of low self-esteem and problem solving skills

References

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9. U.S Department of Justice. Office of Justice Programs. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. Juvenile Violence Research. OJJDP Report to Congress. [Characteristics and Patterns of At-Risk Juveniles and Factors That Contribute to Violence Committed By or Against Juvenile](#). Retrieved, November 2016.
10. Hard indicators are those that have clear evidence whilst soft indicators can be more subjective and difficult to evidence.
11. Department of Child Protection and Support Services, WA. [Youth at Risk Strategy. 2015-2018](#) and Partnership Forum Youth at Risk Working Group (September, 2016). Principles for Developing Services for At-risk Young People. Retrieved October, 2016
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