

# DEFINING YOUNG PEOPLE WITH COMPLEX NEEDS

The Youth Partnership Project identified no consistent definition or process across Government departments to identify young people with complex needs that collectively we are worried about. Evidence shows that these young people can be at risk of juvenile offending. This creates a significant challenge in identifying the right young people who should be provided with targeted early intervention support to prevent this trajectory. This cross-departmental definition of young people at risk of entering the juvenile justice system enables the Youth Partnership Project to provide targeted support to the right young people.

## Definition

Whilst there cannot be an ‘absolute’ definition and there is no ‘formula’ for a young person becoming a juvenile offender, some young people face challenging circumstances which puts them at a greater risk than others. Our definition incorporates various government department’s indicators and definitions, emphasising that **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 entering the juvenile justice system.**

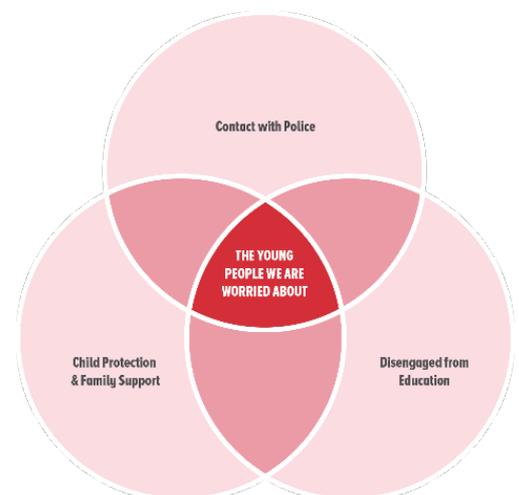
**The Youth Partnership Project defines young people with complex needs as young people, who experience all hard indicators listed below, and any additional risk factors:**

	SITUATIONAL RISK FACTORS	INDIVIDUAL RISK FACTORS
HARD INDICATORS	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. A young person who is related to, associated with or seen with an offender; or who is a witness to or associated with offending.</li> <li>2. A young person living in a conflicting home environment, as indicated by:               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. referrals to DoC-CPFS for child protection concerns (including Family and Domestic Violence); and/or</li> <li>b. being subject to a safety &amp; wellbeing assessment; and/or</li> <li>c. being in the care of DoC-CPFS</li> </ol> </li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. A young person who has:               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. School attendance rate below 59% over 24 months,<sup>1</sup> and/or</li> <li>b. 8+ suspensions and/or a total of 30 days suspension, and/or</li> <li>c. Involved in critical incidences, including physical assault or intimidating/threatening behaviour</li> </ol> </li> </ol>
SOFT INDICATORS	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. A young person experiencing social disadvantage; such as unemployed carers, homelessness or housing stress, family breakdown, transience, lower socioeconomic families or primary carers identified as having issues with mental health, alcohol or other drugs;<sup>2</sup></li> <li>5. A young person who is street present</li> <li>6. Lack of recreational or positive leisure activities</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>7. A young person presents with mental health concerns e.g. depression, anxiety, conduct disorders and/or alcohol and substance abuse</li> <li>8. A young person who, if at school, is               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Not coping in classroom situations;</li> <li>b. Showing signs of low self-esteem and or difficulty with problem solving</li> </ol> </li> </ol>

## In Practice

The YPP’s Youth Intervention Partnership Model has been designed to specifically to focus on boys aged 10-12 years who meet the criteria for young people with complex needs. This target group has been specifically identified due to a disproportionate representation of males in youth detention,<sup>3</sup> and a recognition that this age range provides a key opportunity for early intervention. The identification of young people in this target group for early intervention support is facilitated by the local YIP Coordinator, using the definition above and below process:

- The Department of Communities – Child Protection & Family Support identify young people who meet indicator 2
- The Department of Education Regional Office works with local schools to identify young people meeting indicator 3
- From these lists, WA Police identify the young people who meet indicator 1
- The YIP Coordinator collates the final list and presents to the YIP Steering Committee for review



## Methodology

The Youth Partnership Project team undertook a desktop review and consultation process with key government departments, service providers and young people to develop an overarching definition of young people who have complex needs and have a higher risk of entering the juvenile justice system. The various government departments in Western Australia define 'at-risk' or 'complex needs' using varying indicators dependent on their departmental mandate. However, all indicators across departments are 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 absenteeism rates and behavioural problems;<sup>4</sup> the Department of Communities - Child Protection and Family Support identifies behavioural risks, situational risks (including family functioning) and poor education outcomes;<sup>5</sup> and WA Police identify young people at risk based on relation or involvement with an offender or risks in their domestic situation.<sup>6</sup>

All these definitions align with literature on criminogenic needs – the dynamic risk factors which are directly correlated with recidivism.<sup>7</sup> Research often sites, and empirical evidence indicates, that a young person's relation/association with a known offender and poor family functioning are highly influential 'hard indicators'.<sup>8</sup>

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.<sup>9</sup> These young people identified 'unmet needs' (risk factors) which lead to offending and are aligned with the governmental and theoretical definitions of youth at risk and/or young people with complex needs.

This definitions and process were first implemented in late 2017, to identify young people to take part in the Armadale Youth Intervention Partnership's pilot project. During the first experience implementing the definition there were many learnings related to both indicators and the process. Following discussion with each government department and the AYIP Steering Committee several changes were recommended and have been incorporated.

## References

1. Department of Education classifies severe risk as attending between 0% - 59% and/or 8 suspension and/or 30 days of suspension.
2. 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
3. In WA, males account for 94% of youth detention population on a daily average. Productivity Commissioner, 2018, [Report on Government Services Part F, Chapter 17 Youth Justice Services](#). Retrieved February 2018.
4. Department of Education WA, 2015. [Students at educational risk policy](#). Retrieved, October 2016.
5. Department of Child Protection and Support Services, WA. [Youth at Risk Strategy. 2015-2018](#). Retrieved, August 2016.
6. Davita Theria. 2016. Youth Crime Intervention Officer. Personal Communication. 21 October.
7. King, G. Bresina, D. Glenna, T. 2013. [Evidence based decision making, from principle to practice](#). ICCA Conference. Reno NV. Retrieved, November 2016.
8. Hard indicators are those that have clear evidence whilst soft indicators can be more subjective and difficult to evidence. McAtamney, A. and Morgan, A. 2009. [Key issues in antisocial behavior](#). Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology. Retrieved, November 2016.
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11. 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.
12. Youth Partnership Project, 2016 - [Co- Design Workshop with Young people at Risk](#).