

Evidence informing the youth boot camp program models

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This paper outlines the information used to develop the youth boot camps being trialled in Queensland. The development of the youth boot camp program models involved reviewing existing literature and consulting key stakeholders and experts in criminal justice. A summary of the information collected via each of these methods is provided, followed by a description of how evidence and consultation informed the youth boot camp program models.

Background

The Queensland government made an election commitment to trial youth boot camps. The trial will commence operation in early 2013 and involve 80 young people during its two year operation. Two youth boot camp programs will be trialled – the Early Intervention Youth Boot Camp (EIYBC) at the Gold Coast and a Sentenced Youth Boot Camp (SYBC) in Cairns.

The EIYBC targets young people assessed as having a high risk of long-term involvement in the criminal justice system. It will commence with a ten day camp. This camp will be followed by a community integration phase of up to three months, which will link participants to community-based services. A five day camp will take place at the end of the program. The SYBC will target young people facing detention. It involves a number of phases (residential, community supervision and mentoring) and the implementation of a range of programmatic responses depending on the identified needs of participants.

Boot camp literature

The literature identifies different types of boot camp models. These include:

- military/traditional
- wilderness/adventure
- reform.

Military/traditional boot camps

Military style boot camps emphasise strict discipline and respect to authority. A typical day involves scheduled activities including military drill and ceremony, and physically demanding labour and/or physical activities. These camps were initially introduced to reduce prisoner overcrowding and were meant to act as a viable alternative to incarceration. The theory behind the military style boot camp is that a gruelling and regimented experience will discourage future offending and instil discipline, responsibility and self-esteem.

Military style boot camps have been found to produce positive, short-term attitude change among offenders. Their impact on offending behaviour, however, has been mixed. Some studies have reported that boot camp participants have lower rates of subsequent offending than non-participants, other studies have found no difference in the rate of re-offending among participants and non-participants, and a third group of studies have found participation in boot camps may increase the risk of re-offending among some young people.

For example, Correia (1997) found that military boot camps in the United States were no more effective than traditional incarceration at preventing recidivism and that when

success did occur, it was typically limited to those participants who had engaged in low level offending.¹ Similarly, the Campbell Collaboration review of 43 independent boot camps, most being situated in the United States, with one in Canada and two in Great Britain, found that the likelihood of boot camp participants re-offending was roughly equal to that of comparable non-participants.² The overall effectiveness for juvenile boot camps was slightly lower than for adult boot camps (although the difference was not statistically significant).

Farrington and Welsh (2005) examined evaluations of four American boot camps (one of which included three juvenile camps across the States, and the others of which were in Denver, California and Cleveland) and found no evidence that boot camps reduced offending, with one actually demonstrating that boot camp participants recorded higher recidivism rates than their counterparts incarcerated in youth services facilities.³

An Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC) review of literature on youth crime prevention (2002), concluded that that “intensive strict regimes (for example boot camps) are not effective at reducing reoffending unless they comprise a more therapeutic component and provide skills that generalise to the young person’s usual environment”.⁴

Collectively, evidence suggests that the structure and discipline afforded to young people through the experience of boot camps is likely to be most effective in reducing their risk of re-offending when supported by treatment and skill building and education initiatives (e.g. vocational training, family support).⁵

Wilderness boot camps

The perceived ineffectiveness of military boot camps led to the development of wilderness (or adventure) style boot camps.

Wilderness camps often extend the structure and discipline provided by traditional boot camp programs by incorporating elements thought to reduce the risk of re-offending, including employment assistance, vocational training and family counselling, in addition to intense, physical activity.⁶

Wilderness camps are based on the principle that experiential learning (i.e. learning by doing) provides a context for developing skills and attributes that can be drawn on in broader social contexts. Further, success in completing difficult tasks is thought to increase self-esteem and promote feelings of worth within young offenders.

During the camp, participants are set challenging, physical tasks (e.g. high ropes courses) which, in order to be completed successfully, require the development of unique skills (e.g. problem solving) and pro-social behaviours (e.g. team building). The

¹ Correia M 1997. ‘Boot Camps, Exercise and Delinquency: An analytical Critique of the Use of Physical Exercise to Facilitate Decreases in Delinquent Behaviour,’ *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice*, vol 13, no 2, pp 94-113.

² Wilson D B, MacKenzie D L & Mitchell F N (2008), *Effects of Correctional Boot Camps on Offending*, Campbell Systematic Reviews 2003:1.

³ Farrington D P & Welsh B C 2005. ‘Randomized experiments in criminology: What have we learned in the last two decades?’ *Journal of Experimental Criminology*, vol 1, no 1, 9-38.

⁴ Australian Institute of Criminology (2002) *What works in reducing young peoples involvement in crime: Review of current literature on youth crime prevention*, Australian Capital Territory Government.

⁵ Ashcroft J, Daniels D J & Hart S V 2003. ‘Correctional Boot Camps: Lessons from a Decade of Research,’ National Institute of Justice Report.

⁶ Ibid.

camp may include counselling or a rehabilitative focus in conjunction with the physical activities.

An example of wilderness camps is *Operation Flinders*, is an eight-day wilderness adventure program established in South Australia for at-risk youth. This program aimed to improve school retention and employment, reduce criminality, promote positive relationships between youth and authority, and educate youth in bush skills and Aboriginal culture.

Research has found that wilderness programs are effective in reducing recidivism when the physical activity component is delivered alongside therapeutic support.⁷ An evaluation of *Operation Flinders* found behavioural changes in the youth in relation to their self-esteem, maturity, criminal behaviours, anger management and decisions to stay in school or seek employment. The most significant impact was on high-risk youth.⁸

Reform boot camps

Reform programs further extend traditional boot camps and wilderness programs. In addition to the physical and personal development elements, reform programs provide vocational and tailored support services to specifically address an individual's criminogenic needs as well as ongoing support once offenders have returned to their communities.

The theoretical basis for reform programs is that comprehensive programs that use a variety of approaches specifically addressing the causes of offending can be effective in reducing and preventing offending among young people. Many interventions have been demonstrated to be more effective when they incorporate targeted treatment, most particularly cognitive behavioural therapy and multi-systemic therapy.

These programs typically involve a range of intervention services and activities, including counselling, peer support, cognitive-behavioural skills training, family group therapy, community reintegration and aftercare. The program is designed to address the unique criminogenic and non-criminogenic needs of the offender. Reform programs also typically include an aftercare component which enables offenders to receive ongoing support (e.g. counselling, job readiness, drug and alcohol support) once they return to their communities.

The Campbell Collaboration review of 43 independent boot camps found that boot camps with a strong treatment focus (incorporating rehabilitative programs, such as drug abuse treatment, vocational education, and aftercare transition assistance) produced a slightly greater beneficial effect for participants than those without.⁹

Studies have found however that reform programs, like wilderness and military programs, which do not offer an aftercare component to offenders once they return to the community are no better at reducing offending than a period of imprisonment. Offenders who receive ongoing support once they return to the community have significantly lower rates of arrest over a two-year follow up.

⁷ Wilson & Lipsey (2000), cited in Cameron M & MacDougall C 2000. *Crime prevention through sport and physical activity*. Trends & Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice, no 165, Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology.

⁸ Forensic and Applied Psychology Research Group 2001. *Operation Flinders – the 2001 Evaluation Summary*, Operational Flinders Foundation Board of Management.

⁹ Wilson D B, MacKenzie D L & Mitchell F N 2008. *Effects of Correctional Boot Camps on Offending*, Campbell Systematic Reviews 2003:1.

Consultation

The Attorney-General consulted with key stakeholders and criminal justice experts by way of a roundtable discussion meeting. A number of organisations and people represented at the roundtable meeting also made written submissions outlining issues to be considered when developing the youth boot camp model to be trialled in Queensland. Visits to existing boot camps to obtain information about youth boot camps have also taken place.

The key messages of this consultative activity included that the youth boot camp program:

- be responsive to the needs of young people likely to be referred to the program
- be underpinned by an integrated case management framework
- involve aftercare and mentoring
- involve family members
- be evidenced-based
- reflect the specific cultural requirements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth
- place limits on the amount of time young people are removed from the community
- target young people before they become entrenched in the criminal justice system
- respond to the specific needs of females
- exclude certain young people that may put other participants at risk (such as those with a sexual or violent offence history)
- be evaluated.

Influence of evidence and consultation on program development

The research summarised above has demonstrated that youth boot camps are most effective if they:

- provide structure, discipline and physical activity
- allow for personal development and self-esteem building through physical activities
- address the causes of crime
- provide ongoing support to young people after they return to the community.

The way in which these features and consultation points have been integrated into the youth boot camp program models is described below.

Why are we trialling two models?

The trial of the EIYBC responds to advice indicating that youth boot camps should target young people before they become entrenched in the criminal justice system. This view is consistent with best-practice literature which advocates early intervention as the most effective way to reduce crime in the community.^{10 11} However, research has also

¹⁰ National Crime Prevention 2003. *Pathways to prevention: Developmental and early intervention approaches to crime in Australia*, Summary Volume, Canberra: National Crime Prevention.

demonstrated that the majority of young people engage in minor criminal offences and that most of these young people desist from offending behaviour.¹² Moreover, intervening with young people at low risk of entering the criminal justice system can result in unintentional harm.¹³ Therefore, a robust, evidence-based referral and assessment process will be established to ensure appropriate young people are referred to the EIYBC.

The SYBC responds to the small cohort of young repeat offenders brought before the youth justice system. This group tends to be responsible for a disproportionate amount of crime and are most likely to transition into the adult correctional system.¹⁴ These young people are typically characterised by complex needs and disadvantaged backgrounds including drug misuse, poverty, family dysfunction, mental illness and/or cognitive disability.

Appropriate referral and assessment processes for each youth boot camp will ensure that the focus and intensity of the programs will be appropriate to the assessed level of risk and developmental needs of participants.

How will the programs provide structure, discipline and physical activity?

The EIYBC and SYBC programs will involve the implementation of structured days during the camp/residential phases of the programs. SYBC participants will also participate in structured days while serving their youth justice order in the community after they have completed the residential phase of the program. Involvement in structured days and time in the youth boot camp residence (for SYBC participants) will promote routine, stability and discipline.

Intensive physical activities will be delivered by both programs. These activities will provide a platform for experiential learning processes that will develop the self-awareness, personal skills and self-esteem of young people. The involvement of SYBC participants in community reparation will develop work skills, promote work readiness and provide a consequence for offending behaviour.

How will the program address the causes of crime?

The youth boot camps will involve an individualised approach to program delivery. The criminogenic needs of young people participating in youth boot camps will be identified using validated assessment tools to inform youth boot

camp programmatic responses. Young people involved in the EIYBC will be referred to community-based services to address identified needs, while a range of interventions will be available to young people participating in the SYBC. In particular, the SYBC program includes intensive family support, the delivery of the cognitive behavioural

¹¹ Early interventions may or may not mean early interventions in the life course. The nature and timing of early interventions depends on the identified pathways to offending and critical transition points that characterise those pathways.

¹² Allard T, Stewart A, Chrzanowski A, Ogilvie J, Birks D and Little S 2010. *Police diversion of young offenders and Indigenous over-representation*. Trends & Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice, no. 390. Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology.

¹³ Richards K 2011. *What makes juvenile offenders different from adult offender?* Trends & Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice no. 409. Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology.

¹⁴ Skardhamar T 2009. 'Reconsidering the theory of adolescent-limited and life-course persistent anti-social behaviour'. *British Journal of Criminology* 49: 863–878.

therapy (Aggression Replacement Therapy and Changing Habits And Reaching Targets), placement into flexible education, training and employment and the involvement of health services (including drug treatment).

How will young people be supported in the community?

Young people referred to the EIYBC will be supported in the community for up to three months after completing a ten day camp, while young people involved in the SYBC will be supported in the community for the entire length of their youth justice order after completing the one month residential phase of the program. Community support provided by the EIYBC includes referrals to community-based services and ongoing case management. The implementation of structured days during community integration phase of the SYBC program will provide a mechanism for young people to have continued involvement with the SYBC program components described above.¹⁵

Young people will also be matched with a mentor during the initial stages of both programs. This mentor will provide guidance, encouragement and support to young people both during the programs and after the program completion.

How will family members be involved?

The involvement of young people's family members is a critical feature of both youth boot camp programs. Family members will be involved in the development of case management plans and will be encouraged to participate in EIYBC camp or SYBC residential activities. Family members may be referred to community-based support services by the EIYBC (such as family mediation or counselling services). The intensive family support program provided by the SYBC will develop the skills of young people and their families. This program will be a multi-systemic therapy family skilling program shown to result in improved family functioning.

The importance of family involvement is also reflected in the SYBC referral process, as only young people with family members living in reasonable proximity to the youth boot camp residential facility will be eligible for referral to the program.

How will the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and young female participants be met?

The high proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people likely to be referred to the youth boot camps means that the programs will be delivered with cultural competence. This may involve the provision of cultural awareness training to program staff, the involvement of family and local community members in program delivery and the employment of culturally diverse staff.

The program will also be delivered in a manner that ensures that the specific needs of young female participants are met. This will involve the establishment of suitable accommodation facilities and recognition of the different offence patterns, health issues and levels of exposure to domestic violence and sexual abuse among young females when compared with young males.

Will the programs be evaluated?

¹⁵ The community integration phase follows the residential phase of the SYBC program. The length of the community integration phase will depend on the youth justice order imposed by the sentencing court.

A process and outcome evaluation will be undertaken to determine if the objectives of the EIYBC and SYBC programs are achieved and identify ways to improve the program models.

Process evaluations establish the extent to which a program suited the context for which it was designed, was appropriately implemented, and/or reached those persons for whom it would provide the most benefit.¹⁶ They also allow information obtained during the evaluation to be fed back to program operators for the purpose of improving the program.

Outcome evaluations examine whether a particular program achieved what it intended to achieve. Where a process evaluation is conducted together with an outcome evaluation, the process evaluation can assist to determine *why* a program was effective or not in achieving its intended outcomes.

¹⁶ Saunders R P, Evans M H & Joshi P 2005. 'Developing a process-evaluation plan for assessing health promotion program implementation: A how-to guide', *Health Promotion Practice*, vol 6, no 2, pp 134-147.

Will some young people not be eligible for referral?

There will be some young people where the complexity or seriousness of their individual and family issues will risk the safety of program participants and will therefore not be eligible for referral to either youth boot camps.

Young people not eligible for the youth boot camps include young people:

- not willing to participate in the program
- who have sexually offended
- with significant mental health issues
- exhibiting extreme violence
- demonstrating other extreme behaviour.

Young people assessed as having appropriate protective factors in place to mitigate the likelihood of their involvement in criminal activity will not be referred to the EIYBC.

How will participants be case managed?

The youth boot camp program models involve a range of interconnected program components requiring an integrated case management framework. Program integration will be facilitated by the creation of a case management plan for each young person participating in the youth boot camps. These plans will specify how and when program components are delivered, support the young person's transition from the camp/residential phase of the programs to the community-based phase of the programs and frame the young person's exit from the programs.