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Services to Young Offenders

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Victorian Auditor-General's Office
Auditing in the Public Interest

The Hon. Robert Smith MLC
President
Legislative Council
Parliament House
Melbourne

The Hon. Jenny Lindell MP
Speaker
Legislative Assembly
Parliament House
Melbourne

Dear Presiding Officers

Under the provisions of section 16AB of the *Audit Act 1994*, I transmit my performance report on *Services to Young Offenders*.

Yours faithfully



DDR PEARSON
Auditor-General

11 June 2008

Foreword

Youth offending is a matter of increasing concern for the community and the Government. Offending by young people stems from a range of problems such as family dislocation, alcohol and substance abuse, poor educational outcomes and limited employment opportunities. All these factors require service responses from a range of government and non-government agencies.

This audit examined the extent to which diversionary and rehabilitation services provided by the Department of Human Services (DHS) and the Magistrates' Court of Victoria (MCV) maximise diversion of young offenders from the criminal justice system, reduce the risk of reoffending and improve rehabilitation and reintegration into the community.

The audit found DHS demonstrated good practice in needs identification, case management, diverting young offenders from serving youth custodial sentences and the reintegration of young offenders back into the community. The delivery of services through the Criminal Justice Diversion Program was also well managed by MCV. Nevertheless, DHS and MCV were unable to demonstrate that these services are effective in reducing youth reoffending or successfully rehabilitating young people.

This report makes a range of recommendations designed to improve operational practices. There is a need to embed outcome based performance measurement to assess and report to the Parliament and the community on the extent to which services effectively rehabilitate young people, reduce youth reoffending and minimise their progression through the justice system.

Importantly for the future, a number of recommendations in the report highlight the need to develop an integrated, 'whole of government' approach to the planning, delivery and reporting of services provided to young offenders.



DDR PEARSON
Auditor-General

11 June 2008

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1 Executive summary

1.1 Introduction

In August 2000, the State Government introduced its Juvenile Justice Reform Strategy through the policy document—*A Balanced Approach to Juvenile Justice in Victoria*.

The aims of the strategy were to:

- divert young offenders from entering the youth justice system
- better rehabilitate high-risk young offenders
- reduce the likelihood of reoffending among those released from custody, through better pre-release transition and post-release support programs.

Young offenders, aged 10 to 20 years, apprehended in Victoria, can be diverted from custody through various diversion programs and services and community corrections orders administered by youth justice units. Victoria operates a unique 'dual track' custodial sentencing system, where young people aged 18 to 20 who commit an offence that warrants a custodial sentence may avoid time in an adult prison by serving a sentence in a youth justice centre. Young offenders placed on community-based orders or in custodial supervision are under the jurisdiction of the Department of Human Services (DHS). Those who enter the adult correctional system are under the jurisdiction of the Department of Justice (DoJ).

DHS and DoJ provide a range of rehabilitation programs for young offenders in custody and on community-based orders. DHS also funds non-government providers to deliver a range of transitional and intensive post-release support services for young offenders who return to the community. These services include:

- information and referral
- employment assistance, education and training placements
- accommodation services
- family support.

DoJ, through the Magistrates' Court of Victoria (MCV), delivers a range of court-based diversion programs aimed at early intervention and breaking the cycle of reoffending for young and adult offenders. These programs include the Drug Court, Court Referral and Evaluation for Drug Intervention and Treatment/Bail Support Program, the Court Integrated Services Program and the Criminal Justice Diversion Program (CJDP).

The focus of this audit was to determine the extent to which the diversion and rehabilitative services provided by DHS and MCV to young offenders:

- maximised diversion from the criminal justice system
- reduced the risk of reoffending
- improved rehabilitation and reintegration into the community.

The scope of the audit was limited to a selected range of services focusing on the younger age groups and those considered most likely to benefit from specialist interventions. The audit covered services to young offenders provided by:

- DHS through youth justice units and youth justice custodial centres and the Adult Court Advice and Support Service (ACAS)
- MCV through CJDP and the Neighbourhood Justice Centre (NJC).

1.2 Findings

Service planning

At the time of the Juvenile Justice Reform Strategy's introduction, over seven years ago, the State Government indicated that the achievements of the strategy would be evaluated and reported to the community. While selected data is available to suggest that some of the reforms have been effective, and a range of independent reviews and evaluations have been conducted, the strategy has not been evaluated and reported to the Parliament and the community.

The audit identified areas for improvement in the planning of services for young offenders including the development of:

- outcome measures and targets linked to key youth justice objectives
- performance measures and targets that link to key strategic and operational activities and initiatives for juvenile justice.

In recognition of this, DHS has recently commissioned research through the Australian Institute of Criminology and established a number of projects to develop more suitable measures at both a local and national level.

A more whole-of-government approach should be developed to planning youth justice services.

In relation to MCV, the court's planning documents need to clearly describe the diversion services and initiatives that aim to prevent young offenders from progressing through the justice system.

Service coordination

The audit identified some positive examples of coordination in youth justice services. For example, the location of a range of government services at NJC in Collingwood facilitates service coordination and the timely referral of young offenders to treatment and counselling services.

DHS has well developed processes to coordinate services for young offenders through:

- agreements and protocols between DHS program areas and other government agencies involved in the provision of youth justice services
- contracted community-based service providers.

Needs identification

The identification of young offenders' needs is largely effective. However, in the absence of criteria to assess the suitability of offenders to participate in CJDP, there is a risk of inconsistency in the identification of suitable CJDP candidates. The development of such criteria for Victoria Police would reduce the potential inconsistencies in determining the eligibility of offenders to participate in CJDP.

Case management and service delivery

Youth justice units and youth justice custodial centres use appropriate case management practices to: establish clear aims and objectives for young offenders; match the level of interventions with the assessed level of risk; meet the needs of Indigenous offenders through Koori justice programs; support the reintegration of young offenders into the community.

Diversion coordinators refer offenders to other government service providers co-located at NJC for a needs assessment, referral services and interventions required to address their identified risks and needs.

Information systems

The Client Relationship Information System (CRIS) is a critical system for youth justice. The system does not currently provide sufficient analytical data to management on the effectiveness of interventions and services in rehabilitating young offenders and reducing rates of reoffending. DHS is currently improving the functionality of CRIS to enable greater data interrogation and more flexible and tailored management reporting. These improvements should focus on aligning planned interventions and services with the achievement of assessed outcomes for young offenders and for the youth justice program as a whole.

A whole-of-government approach should be adopted for data collection and analysis to support shared needs identification, planning and coordination of youth justice services.

Efficiency and effectiveness

It is difficult for Parliament and the community to assess the efficiency and effectiveness of services supporting the rehabilitation of young offenders and reducing reoffending, because of the limitations of outcome and performance measures.

The costs and resource utilisation for CJDP are managed within a simple service delivery model with an adequate level of information and control. However, the information does not focus on the efficiency of service delivery.

DHS has not conducted periodic research to assess changes in the rate of youth reoffending over time. Therefore, audit cannot provide any assurance as to whether the Juvenile Justice Reform Strategy has effectively reduced the likelihood of reoffending.

Given that reducing youth reoffending and improving rehabilitation are central objectives of the Juvenile Justice Reform Strategy announced in August 2000, addressing the limited information available on the achievement of these objectives should be a priority.

Recognising the need to measure outcomes achieved by individual youth justice programs, DHS recently commissioned the Australian Institute of Criminology to advise on appropriate outcome-based measures for the youth justice system.

We analysed DHS data and a subset of performance data for 10 to 17-year-old offenders. Consistent with the objectives of the Juvenile Justice Reform Strategy, we found a reduction in the number of young offenders serving custodial sentences in Victoria between 2000–01 and 2007–08. They are being diverted from progression into the youth justice systems. The data also show that access to pre-release, transition and post-release support programs has increased.

The MCV and DoJ need to embed outcome-based performance measurement to assess reoffending rates, the diversion of offenders from the justice system and the extent to which behaviours of offenders are modified.

Service improvement

There is a service improvement culture within youth justice services that is evident through the implementation of DHS's Service Excellence Framework. Service improvement mechanisms at youth justice custodial centres included the incorporation of young offenders and custodial staff input into the quality review process. Nevertheless, youth justice units and ACAS lack a structured approach to incorporating client feedback into continuous improvement processes.

Feedback from offenders and victims is obtained for CJDP. However, the information gained is not being used for continuous quality improvement in the delivery of the program.

The audit found that a number of independent reviews and program evaluations commissioned by DHS have led to significant service improvements. For example, reviews into security and operational practices have reduced the number of escapes from custodial centres and the Rehabilitation Review resulted in the implementation of the Victorian Offender Needs Indicator for Youth. DHS also has a number of current reviews underway into youth justice service delivery, focusing on service development and improving service delivery options. It is important that these reviews inform future innovation and service improvement in the system.

1.3 Conclusion

Among the staff and agencies providing youth justice services, this audit identified a high level of commitment and effort toward achieving the Victorian Government's Juvenile Justice Reform Strategy goals. The strategy itself has clearly articulated aims, objectives and outcomes for young offenders, which underpin statewide planning for youth justice units and youth justice custodial centres.

In the areas of the youth justice system we examined, and consistent with the aims of the strategy, there are indications of success, including the diversion of young offenders from custodial sentences, demonstrated good practice with respect to needs identification, case management and the delivery of rehabilitation programs, and increased access to pre-release, transition and post-release programs.

Reducing youth reoffending and effectively rehabilitating the behaviour of young offenders are central objectives of the strategy, however DHS could not conclusively demonstrate that these goals were being achieved. Critically, gaps in performance and outcomes measurement are impairing the ability of Parliament and the community to monitor the youth justice system as a whole.

Although DHS has undertaken a range of independent reviews and program evaluations, there needs to be an improved focus on the implementation of data collection systems and performance measurement to establish the effectiveness of these services in achieving improved outcomes and the government's youth justice objectives.

While the delivery of CJDP is well managed, MCV was unable to demonstrate its effectiveness in diverting young people from reoffending. While CJDP is provided to all eligible offenders, young offenders constitute 15 to 20 per cent of all participants. Performance measures specifically relating to this group should be developed.

Multiple government and non-government agencies are involved in the delivery of youth justice services. Developing a more whole-of-government or 'joined up' approach to planning, coordination, data collection and performance measurement in Victoria's youth justice system needs to be a priority for all agencies in the system.

1.4 Recommendations

Service planning

- DHS should review the Juvenile Justice Reform Strategy to determine its relevance and the extent to which its objectives and outcomes have been achieved (Recommendation 3.1).

Needs identification

- MCV should provide Victoria Police with clear criteria to determine the eligibility and suitability of offenders to participate in CJD (Recommendation 5.1).

Integrated case management and service delivery

- DHS should:
 - ensure that young offenders agree and signoff against the goals and objectives identified in their client services plans
 - implement appropriate systems to clearly and consistently document a young offender's progress towards their case management
 - review the effectiveness of parole planning and post-release programs to facilitate access to support services and the reintegration of young offenders returning to rural and remote areasdevelop a standardised service plan for the management of young offenders on supervised bail (Recommendation 6.1).

Information systems

- DHS should enhance the management reporting capability of CRIS to identify:
 - trends in the needs of young offenders
 - the effectiveness of interventions and services in meeting the assessed needs of young offenders and modifying their behaviourthe extent to which interventions and services contribute to the rehabilitation of young offenders and reduced recidivism (Recommendation 7.1).
- DHS, in conjunction with other State Government departments and agencies involved in the delivery of youth justice services, should develop a whole-of-government approach to data collection and analysis to support shared planning and service development. This should be complemented by arrangements to support effective information sharing within and across agencies (Recommendation 7.2).

Cost, efficiency and effectiveness

- DHS, DoJ and MCV should:
 - expedite the development of benchmark data to measure operational efficiency
 - incorporate output data into operational management reports that track output cost rates
 - review output and unit cost data to form a baseline against which current performance can be assessed (Recommendation 8.1).
- DHS should:
 - ensure that outcome measures being developed by the Australian Institute of Criminology adequately assess the effectiveness of youth justice programs and services in reducing reoffending and improving rehabilitation
 - assess the feasibility of using the Victorian Offender Needs Indicator for Youth to enable the effectiveness of youth justice programs, services and interventions aimed at rehabilitating young offenders to be measured (Recommendation 8.2).
- MCV and DoJ should measure and report the number of young offenders accessing CJDP, the nature of service and intervention referrals that are made, and the number of diversion plans that are successfully completed (Recommendation 8.3).
- MCV should develop and implement outcome-based performance measures that assess the effectiveness of CJDP in:
 - achieving a sustained rate of reduction in reoffending and diversion of offenders from progressing through the justice system
 - rehabilitating offenders through referral to services and interventions that are aimed at changing their offending behaviours (**Recommendation 8.4**).

Service improvement

- DHS should implement a structured client feedback mechanism for youth justice units and ACAS that provides young offenders with the opportunity to provide input into the delivery of community-based services and supervision (Recommendation 9.1).
- DHS should develop its CRIS to systematically collect and analyse data demonstrating the extent to which system-wide initiatives are improving responsiveness in service delivery and the achievement of client, program and system outcomes (Recommendation 9.2).
- MCV should analyse information received on CJDP questionnaires, and report key findings (Recommendation 9.3).

RESPONSE provided by the Secretary, Department of Human Services

The department welcomes the report, as it reinforces the fundamental direction and operation of Victoria's youth justice system, and will assist in fine tuning the future direction and performance of the system. The recommendations in the report are generally supported by the department and careful consideration has been given to the potential implications arising from these recommendations.

General comments and detailed responses to the recommendations provided by the Secretary are located at Appendix A of the Report.

RESPONSE provided by the Acting Secretary, Department of Justice

The department welcomes the report and supports in principle its recommendations. The Secretary notes that some of the recommendations will need to be thoroughly considered before the department can commit to implementing them as they may have resource implications and will require collaboration with Victoria Police.

General comments and detailed responses to the recommendations provided by the Secretary are located at Appendix A of the Report.

2 About services to young offenders

At a glance

Background

In Victoria, services for young offenders are provided by the Department of Human Services (DHS) and the Department of Justice (DoJ), and involve the police, the courts and agencies that provide custodial or community correctional services.

The ministerial statement—*A Balanced Approach to Juvenile Justice in Victoria*, released in August 2000, presented the government's Juvenile Justice Reform Strategy for the youth justice system. The strategy focused on:

- diverting young offenders from entering the youth justice system, or from progressing further into a life of crime
- providing better rehabilitation of high-risk offenders
- expanding pre-release, transition and post-release support programs for custodial clients to reducing the likelihood of offending.

Research undertaken by DHS indicates that young people are 50 per cent more likely to commit an offence than adults, with about 50 per cent of these young people likely to reoffend.

DHS collect and analyse service demand data for young offenders in custodial supervision or serving community-based orders. However, the underdeveloped outcome and performance measures impact on the usefulness of this data as presented in the state's budget papers. In addition, changes in counting rules has made it difficult to compare budget paper data between years.

Services to young offenders delivered by the Magistrates' Court of Victoria (MCV) and reviewed in this audit include those provided through the Criminal Justice Diversion Program (CJDP). CJDP offers first-time offenders an opportunity to avoid a criminal conviction and a criminal record by agreeing to participate in a diversion planning process. The program is administered by DoJ and MCV, and delivered by the court.

2.1 Background

Young people have high rates of offending and reoffending. This is due to a number of factors, including poor educational outcomes, unemployment, substance abuse, disrupted family lives and poor social and community supports. Research indicates that young people are 50 per cent more likely to commit an offence than adults, with about 50 per cent of these young people likely to reoffend¹.

The Juvenile Justice Reform Strategy was introduced through the ministerial statement—*A Balanced Approach to Juvenile Justice in Victoria* in August 2000. The strategy presented the Victorian Government's focus on the provision of juvenile justice services, which aimed to:

- divert young offenders from entering the youth justice system or from progressing further into a life of crime
- provide better rehabilitation of high-risk offenders
- expand pre-release, transition and post-release support programs for custodial clients to reduce the likelihood of offending.

Services for young offenders involve the police, the courts and agencies that provide youth justice programs or correctional services. Both the Department of Human Services (DHS) and the Department of Justice (DoJ) provide custodial and community-based supervision for young offenders. Effective collaboration between these agencies is therefore important.

2.1.1 Policy context

Legislative framework

The Victorian criminal justice system defines a young offender as 'someone aged 10 to 20-years of age, who has committed an offence'. This definition arises from:

- the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005*, which defines a 'child' as a person who at the time they committed an alleged offence was aged 10 to 18 years
- the *Sentencing Act 1991*, which defines a 'young offender' as 'an offender who at the time of being sentenced is under the age of 21 years'.

Unlike other states, the Victorian legislation includes an option for adult courts to sentence a young person aged 18 to 20 to a DHS-administered youth training centre or an adult prison. This 'dual-track' system enables young offenders aged 18 to 20 to serve custodial sentences in a youth training centre when the court believes there are considerable prospects for rehabilitation, the young person is easily influenced, is immature or is likely to be vulnerable within the adult prison environment.

Given this legislative framework, the broad policy context for services to young offenders is spread across a number of agencies. At present there is no comprehensive whole-of-government strategy covering services for young offenders.

¹ Department of Human Services, *Recidivism among Victorian Juvenile Justice Clients, 1997–2001*, Department of Human Services, Victoria 2001.

2.1.2 Young offenders—overview and needs

While youth justice collects aggregate data on the number of offenders aged less than 21 years in Victoria, this information is not routinely available. Information on youth offenders from DHS, indicates that:

- Victoria has the lowest rates of young people aged 10 to 17 under community-based and detention-based supervision across Australian jurisdictions
- in 2005–2006, 1 326 young Victorians were in community-based supervision and 279 were in detention-based supervision at some time during the year.

Figure 2A shows the number of young offenders in Victoria in custodial supervision and those serving community-based orders over the period 2005–06 to 2007–08 and has been compiled using DHS annual reports and state budget papers.

The usefulness of data shown in Figure 2A has been improved from 2007–08 by providing targets and actual data on the annual daily average number of young offenders in custody, rather than the average utilisation rate of custodial centres as shown in previous reporting periods. More importantly, this provides clearer information on the number of young offenders being diverted from custodial sentences, which is a key objective of the youth justice system.

Figure 2A
Youth justice clients

Youth Justice Services	2005–06		2006–07		2007–08	
	Target	Actual	Target	Actual	Target	Actual
Youth Justice Custodial Services						
Male (15 years plus)						
• Custodial capacity (number)	192	192	192	192	(a)	(a)
• Average daily custodial centre utilisation rate (per cent)	90	63	90	65	65–75	65–85
• Annual daily average number of young people in custody: Males (over 15 years)					115–135	115–135
Male (under 15 years) and females						
• Custodial capacity (number)	42	42	42	42	(a)	(a)
• Average daily custodial centre utilisation rate (per cent)	65	36	65	36	40–65	40–65
• Annual daily average number of young people in custody: Male (under 15 years) and female					15–25	15–25
Community-based orders						
Youth justice clients on community-based orders	1 152	1 159	1 152	1 221	950	1 050

Source: Department of Human Services, *Annual Reports, 2005–06 and 2006–07, Victorian Budget Papers, Budget Paper No. 3, Service Delivery, 2007–08 and 2008–09.*

Note: (a) Measure deleted from 2007–08.

DHS advised that the measures in the budget papers have required changes to reflect both legislative amendments to the *Children Youth and Families Act* and changes to the client relationship information data collection system. This has affected the comparability of the data over consecutive years. Changes in counting rules has made it difficult to compare budget paper data between years.

The Youth Justice Program collects a significant amount of data on young offenders. This is analysed and reported to DHS management and the Estimates Review Committee on a quarterly basis. Aggregate data on young offenders is also provided annually to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare for the publication of the *Juvenile Justice in Australia* report, and to the Australian Institute of Criminology for the report on juveniles in detention report.

2.1.3 Services to young offenders

The continuum of service delivery includes:

- Victoria Police, who may issue a caution to young people
- courts, where matters related to the charges against young people are heard. In Victoria, these matters may be heard in the Children's Court of Victoria or the Magistrate's Court of Victoria (MCV). Diversion programs accessed through MCV include the Criminal Justice Diversion Program (CJDP)
- the Youth Services and Youth Justice Branch of DHS, which is responsible for the supervision and case management of young offenders on community-based orders and those under custodial supervision in youth justice custodial centres. Youth justice units also provide pre-sentencing reports through the Children's Court Advice Service and the Adult Court Advice and Support Service (ACAS)
- DoJ, which is responsible for the supervision and case management of young people aged 18 to 20 serving a period of detention in an adult prison or who are on a community-corrections order.

2.1.4 Department of Human Services

Services to young offenders delivered by DHS and reviewed in this audit were those provided through:

- Youth justice units
- Youth justice custodial centres
- Adult Court Advice and Support Service (ACAS).

Youth justice units

Youth justice units are a significant part of DHS 'front-line' efforts to divert young people from progressing too far into the youth justice system. These units provide case management, including risk assessment, case planning and review, intensive support and referral and statutory supervision to young people on community-based correctional orders and specialist youth-focused advice to courts.

The range of supervised community-based orders is as follows:

- **Probation**—is the lowest level community-based sentence given by a Magistrate in the Children's Court.
- **Youth Supervision Order**—is usually given to young people who have offended and appeared in court before and who have been found guilty of a serious offence, or a number of offences.
- **Youth Attendance Order**—is usually given to young people who have been found guilty of a serious offence or who have appeared in court many times.
- **Parole**—allows young people aged between 10 and 20 to serve the final part of a custodial sentence in the community under the supervision of a parole officer.

Youth justice custodial centres

Three youth justice custodial centres in Victoria accommodate young offenders on remand or who have received a custodial order. Services are provided by the:

- Parkville Youth Custodial Centre, for boys aged 10 to 14 and young women aged 10 to 20
- Melbourne Youth Custodial Centre, for boys aged 15 to 17
- Malmsbury Youth Custodial Centre, for young men aged 18 to 20.

Adult Court Advice and Support Service

ACAS is provided by youth justice units and focuses on young people between 18 to 21 who are appearing in adult courts. Those aged 10 to 18 who are appearing in the Children's Court are supported by the Children's Court Advice Service. ACAS staff assesses the suitability of young persons appearing in court for:

- placement in a youth justice custodial centres
- bail and supervised bail.

2.1.5 Magistrates' Court of Victoria

Criminal Justice Diversion Program

Services to young offenders delivered by MCV and reviewed in this audit include those provided through the Criminal Justice Diversion Program (CJDP).

CJDP offers first-time offenders an opportunity to avoid a criminal conviction and a criminal record by agreeing to participate in a diversion planning process. The program is administered by DoJ and MCV, and delivered by the court.

The program is available to offenders of any age and does not differentiate between young offenders and other age groups. Around 15 to 20 per cent of offenders in CJDP are thought to be aged between 18 and 20.

2.2 Audit objective

The focus of the audit was to determine the extent to which the diversionary and rehabilitative services provided by DHS, DoJ and MCV to young offenders, maximise diversion from the criminal justice system, reduce the risk of reoffending and improve rehabilitation and reintegration into the community.

The audit addressed the following questions:

- Do DHS, DoJ and MCV adequately plan and coordinate their approaches for identifying and responding to the justice program requirements for young offenders?
- Are programs and services to young offenders economical, efficient and effective?
- Do DHS, DoJ and MCV adequately measure, monitor and report on the performance of programs and services provided for young offenders?
- Are the results of the performance monitoring framework used to improve the design and delivery of programs and services to young offenders?

2.3 Scope

Given the range and complexity of the services to young offenders and other constraints, the scope of the audit was limited to services focused on the younger age groups and those considered most likely to benefit from specialist interventions. The audit scope covered:

- the work of youth justice units, youth justice custodial centres and ACAS
- the operation of CJDP and the Neighbourhood Justice Centre (NJC) as it relates to young offenders.

2.4 Method

The audit method involved:

- examination of relevant documentation, including policies, procedures and guidelines, internal business reports and program reviews and evaluations
- interviews with senior management of DHS, DoJ, MCV and NJC
- interviews with key stakeholders, management, staff and young people under youth justice supervision, and review of a selection of case files at various metropolitan and regional youth justice units (including ACAS) and the three youth justice custodial centres
- interviews with magistrates, external stakeholders and diversion coordinators, and review of a selection of case files at various MCV locations and NJC.

The total cost of this audit was \$396 000. The cost includes staff time, overheads and printing.

3 Service planning

At a glance

Background

The Juvenile Justice Reform Strategy emphasised that a whole-of-government approach should be taken to service planning and coordination to reflect the shared responsibility of government agencies for addressing young offenders' needs.

Key findings

While the Juvenile Justice Reform Strategy has clearly stated goals and defined outcomes, this strategy was introduced over seven years ago and has not been evaluated to determine whether its stated outcomes have been achieved or whether its goals remain relevant. While a range of independent reviews and evaluations have been conducted and selected data suggests some of the reforms have been effective, the strategy has not been evaluated and reported to the Parliament and the community.

The Department of Human Services (DHS) and the Department of Justice have developed a joint policy framework and action plan for the management of young offenders across the departments, which outlines a joint approach to introduce a range of system improvements, including information sharing, research and evaluation, data collection and performance reporting.

In the strategic planning for the delivery of services to young offenders there are a number of areas for improvement, including the need to develop:

- outcome measures and targets linked to key youth justice objectives
- performance measures and targets that link to key strategic and operational activities and initiatives for juvenile justice.

Key recommendation

- DHS should review the Juvenile Justice Reform Strategy to determine its relevance and the extent to which its objectives and outcomes have been achieved. **(Recommendation 3.1)**

3.1 Introduction

If services to young offenders are to maximise rehabilitation and reduce reoffending they must respond to the complex social and behavioural needs of young offenders. The behaviour of many young offenders is affected by factors such as drug use, mental health issues, disengagement from education, fractured family lives and a lack of community and social supports.

Given the number of factors that result in offending behaviour, multiple agencies are involved in providing services for young offenders. The audit examined whether services delivered to young offenders were strategically planned at the whole-of-government level and agency level.

3.2 Service planning

The Juvenile Justice Reform Strategy emphasised that a whole-of-government approach should be taken to service planning and coordination to reflect the shared responsibility of government agencies for addressing young offenders' needs.

3.2.1 Whole-of-government approach

A Balanced Approach to Juvenile Justice in Victoria, introduced the government's Juvenile Justice Reform Strategy in August 2000. This strategy introduced a number of initiatives aimed at consolidating the government's approach to youth justice, which included crime prevention and the rehabilitation of young offenders with complex behaviours. The goals of the strategy are:

- diverting young offenders from entering the youth justice system, or from progressing further into a life of crime
- providing better rehabilitation of high-risk young offenders
- expanding pre-release, transition and post-release support programs for custodial clients to reduce the likelihood of reoffending.¹

The implementation of the reform strategy and its associated initiatives were anticipated to contribute to the following outcomes:

- an increased diversion of 17 to 20-year-old young offenders away from the criminal justice system
- an overall reduction in the number of young offenders held in custody
- greater responsiveness to the rehabilitation of young offenders by providing youth-focused, gender and culturally specific management of young offenders
- a positive response to the drug issue affecting young offenders.²

¹ *A Balanced Approach to Juvenile Justice in Victoria*, Ministerial Statement, Minister for Community Services, August 2000, pp. 3 and 18.

² *A Balanced Approach to Juvenile Justice in Victoria*, Ministerial Statement, Minister for Community Services, August 2000, p. 18.

This strategy was introduced over seven years ago and has not been evaluated to determine whether its stated outcomes have been achieved or whether its goals remain relevant. Data on young offenders in custody reviewed by audit indicates that the strategy has been successful in diverting young offenders from custodial sentences. While this strategy has clearly stated goals and outcomes, there are no details regarding:

- who is responsible for the achievement and measurement of the strategy's stated outcomes and objectives
- outcome targets or how outcomes would be measured
- timeframes for the assessment of the initiatives introduced through the reform strategy
- how and when the strategy would be evaluated to determine its ongoing relevance and success.

The audit identified a number of fora across government in relation to youth justice issues, including the Youth Justice Ministerial Roundtable, the Interdepartmental Committee on Children and Youth, the Aboriginal Justice Forum, and the Youth Services, the Youth Justice Branch Advisory Group. Collaboration takes the form of information sharing, providing input into the planning of service initiatives and meeting periodically to monitor and review service delivery. The Department of Human Services (DHS) and the Department of Justice (DoJ) have developed a joint policy framework and action plan for the management of young offenders across the two departments and outlines a joint approach to introduce a range of system improvements including information sharing, research and evaluation, data collection and performance reporting.

However, there is no whole-of-government strategic planning of services to young offenders. This collaboration would be enhanced by the development of a whole-of-government approach to the strategic planning of services to young offenders that included Victoria Police, courts and other agencies providing services to young offenders that clearly states the:

- roles, responsibilities and initiatives of the key government agencies involved in service planning and delivery
- performance measures and outcomes that reflect the government's strategic objectives for the provision of services to young offenders.³

³ There should also be consistency with the Government's overall strategic directions as articulated in *Growing Victoria Together* and *a Fairer Victoria*.

3.2.2 Department of Human Services

DHS has a clearly articulated strategic planning framework governing services to young offenders. This comprises three levels of planning, including:

- the Youth Services and Youth Justice strategic plan
- regional plans for each of the youth justice units
- the Youth Justice Custodial Services plan.

The Youth Services and Youth Justice strategic plan

The draft Youth Services and Youth Justice strategic plan, which was released in September 2007, describes how services to young offenders are planned and delivered through youth justice units and youth justice custodial centres. The main features of the strategic plan include:

- clearly defined aims and objectives aligned with the strategic direction articulated in *A Balanced Approach to Juvenile Justice in Victoria*
- processes to review relevant trends and to identify emerging needs of young offenders, as well as articulating future directions for the program
- engagement of key government agencies and other stakeholders involved in youth justice, such as Victoria Police, DoJ, Aboriginal organisations, the judiciary, the Youth Parole Board, and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development
- the assignment of key outcomes and milestones, against each objective within the strategic plan.

However, the plan does not specify:

- outcome measures and targets that should be linked to key objectives
- how outcomes would be measured and who is responsible for measurement
- performance measures and targets that should be linked to key activities
- when the draft plan will be officially endorsed by DHS management.

Youth justice units

Operational plans for youth justice units specify objectives and outcomes which are linked to Youth Services and Youth Justice strategic plan. The operational plans of youth justice units describe:

- the role of youth justice units in the delivery of services to young offenders
- the governance structure and assignment of management responsibilities for the delivery of youth services
- performance measures and progressive milestones that are established against key activities and initiatives. However, these performance measures were mainly descriptive and did not specify quantitative or qualitative targets to measure actual performance.

These operational plans could be improved by the development and linkage of:

- outcome measures and targets to key objectives
- quantitative and qualitative performance measures and targets to key activities and initiatives.

Youth justice custodial centres

The three-year *Youth Justice Custodial Services Plan* is a document describing the delivery of services in youth justice custodial centres. The plan articulates aims and objectives that are aligned with the strategic direction of the Youth Services and Youth Justice strategic plan.

While these plans specify performance measures, they are limited to statements of activities, and there are some quantitative measures. There are no qualitative measures of performance. Importantly, there are no measures of client outcomes or measures that demonstrate the effectiveness of initiatives introduced to improve services despite these areas being identified as priorities.

Conclusion

Overall, the youth justice strategic planning is linked to the government's Juvenile Justice Reform Strategy and has clearly articulated aims, objectives and outcomes for young offenders. These underpin the planning for youth justice units and youth justice custodial centres.

At the time of the Juvenile Justice Reform Strategy's introduction, over seven years ago, the government stated that the achievements of the strategy would be evaluated and reported to the community. This has not occurred.

In the strategic planning for the delivery of services to young offenders there are a number of areas for improvement, including the need to develop:

- outcome measures and targets linked to key youth justice objectives
- performance measures and targets that link to key strategic and operational activities and initiatives for juvenile justice.

Recognising the need to measure outcomes achieved by individual youth justice programs, DHS has recently commissioned the Australian Institute of Criminology to advise on the development of appropriate outcomes-based measures for the youth justice system.

Recommendation

- 3.1 DHS should review the Juvenile Justice Reform Strategy to determine its relevance and the extent to which its objectives and outcomes have been achieved.

3.2.3 Magistrates' Court of Victoria

Criminal Justice Diversion Program

DoJ and the Magistrates' Court of Victoria (MCV) work together in the planning of the Criminal Justice Diversion Program (CJDP), with MCV delivering the diversion program to young offenders.

CJDP is reflected in MCV's strategic and business planning processes and details the program's:

- operational aims, objectives and outcomes
- major initiatives to support its delivery
- governance structure which includes reporting arrangements to DoJ and MCV
- monitoring of performance against output targets and program initiatives
- process to review trends and emerging issues.

At the local court level, action plans include details about CJDP, its objectives, key local initiatives, expected outcomes and staff responsible for its delivery.

MCV's strategic plan for 2005–2008 and court action plans refer to offenders generally, and limited references are made to young offenders specifically. Given that young offenders make up around 15 to 20 per cent of all CJDP clients, these plans should detail initiatives targeted at young offenders.

Conclusion

MCV's strategic planning documents should clearly describe diversion services and initiatives aimed at helping prevent young offenders from progressing through the justice system.

4 Service coordination

At a glance

Background

Young offenders receive services from multiple government agencies. Effective service coordination that integrates service delivery between the government and the non-government sectors is necessary to ensure that young offenders are able to access the services they need.

Key findings

The Department of Human Services (DHS) has well developed processes to coordinate services for young offenders through:

- agreements and protocols between DHS program areas and other government agencies involved in the provision of youth justice services
- contracted community-based service providers.

Diversion coordinators at the local magistrates' court level coordinate access to services through links with community-based service providers. At the Neighbourhood Justice Centre, co-location of a range of services facilitates timely service coordination and referral.

4.1 Service coordination

Young offenders receive services from multiple government agencies, including youth justice units and youth justice custodial centres, child protection services, disability services, adult correctional services, mental health and alcohol and drug services. Lower-level offenders, such as those participating in the Criminal Justice Diversion Program (CJDP), are linked into appropriate voluntary work, community agencies or assessment services, as directed through the requirements of their diversion plans.

In this part of the audit we expected to find:

- strategies in place to access services required to address young offenders' needs
- demonstrated collaboration and partnerships in service delivery
- that the roles and responsibilities of those involved in supporting young offenders are well defined and understood.

4.1.1 Department of Human Services

Youth justice units and Adult Court Advice and Support Service

The audit identified that the Department of Human Services (DHS) works with other government agencies and community-based service providers to coordinate the delivery of services to young offenders. Youth justice units and the Adult Court Advice and Support Service (ACAS) coordinate services for young offenders through:

- agreements and protocols with other government agencies and the courts, which outline roles and responsibilities in providing services. This includes the joint DHS and the Department of Justice (DoJ) policy framework for the management of young adult offenders that has put forward a range of projects focusing on performance measurement, data and information sharing, and joint research initiatives
- agreements and protocols within DHS program areas who are responsible for the delivery of disability services, housing and mental health services, alcohol and drug services and other related services to young offenders
- the co-location of staff from other government programs with youth justice staff to provide a mix of services needed by young offenders
- community-based service providers that are contracted to provide services to young offenders.

Services are coordinated at a policy level, through agreements and protocols, however, this does not represent a whole-of-government approach to the integrated and strategic coordination of services to young offenders.

A number of DHS regions, particularly rural regions, advised audit that they faced increasing difficulties in accessing mental health and housing services for young offenders. The Youth Services and Youth Justice branch is working with its allied program areas within DHS, the mental health and housing branches, to improve service delivery to young people.

DHS has also reviewed the delivery of services to young offenders by contracted community-based agencies and aims to improve service coordination and delivery. The review has resulted in a new service delivery model that requires agencies to integrate regional service providers with all other government youth services, such as mental health, drug and alcohol, education employment and training. This model will be implemented in October 2008 for metropolitan regions and January 2009 for rural regions.

Youth justice custodial centres

Similar, well developed processes including, agreements and protocols with government agencies and contractual agreements with the non-government service providers exist at youth justice custodial centres to coordinate services for young offenders. However, the audit found that youth justice custodial centres faced a number of difficulties in coordinating services to young offenders. These included:

- difficulties in accessing information regarding young offenders from other government agencies including child protection and corrections, due to privacy issues, which are required to support the needs identification process
- difficulties in accessing educational programs in the community for young offenders leaving custody
- the lack of service system options for young offenders with multiple complex needs, such as serious violent offenders experiencing acute psychotic episodes, or sex offenders with an intellectual disability.

Conclusion

Multiple agencies are involved in delivering services to young offenders. DHS has well developed processes to coordinate services for young offenders through:

- agreements and protocols between DHS program areas and other government agencies involved in the provision of youth justice services
- contracted community-based service providers.

Youth justice workers coordinate access to support services for young offenders in youth justice units and for those appearing before the Children's Court and adult court jurisdictions through contracted community-based service providers.

Youth justice custodial centres and youth justice units face increasing difficulty accessing services for young offenders, particularly in rural regions. In recognition of this, the Youth Services and Youth Justice branch is working to address these issues together with allied program areas and a new service delivery model will be introduced to improve the integration of services to young offenders.

4.1.2 The Magistrates' Court of Victoria

Criminal Justice Diversion Program

The Criminal Justice Diversion Program (CJDP) requires well structured service coordination to support the effective operation of the program. In many cases defendants are ordered to access services to modify their behaviour or complete voluntary community-based work as a condition of the diversion ruling. The court's diversion coordinators manage access to such services and provide work opportunities through community service providers and organisations that facilitate voluntary community work.

The audit examined the operation of CJDP at the Neighbourhood Justice Centre (NJC) and found that a number of government services, including drug and alcohol services and housing assistance are located at NJC. This gives diversion coordinators ready access to a wide range of services on site that facilitate the timely service referral for young offenders.

Conclusion

Diversion coordinators, who administer CJDP at the local court level, coordinate access to services for young offenders through links that they have with community-based service providers. At NJC, the co-location of a number of government services facilitates timely service coordination and referral for young offenders.

5 Needs identification

At a glance

Background

As a range of personal and environmental circumstances contribute to youth offending, an effective assessment framework must recognise young people's complex behaviours and needs.

Key findings

The use of the Victorian Offender Needs Indicator for Youth (VONIY) to assess young offender risks and needs represents best practice as a risk and needs assessment tool. The Department of Human Services uses VONIY to determine the needs of young offenders by:

- identifying the underlying risk factors that contribute to offending behaviour and the risk of reoffending
- engaging young persons in the assessment process.

In some circumstances, it is difficult to access reliable client information about the profile and behaviours of young people being admitted to custodial centres.

In the absence of criteria to assess the suitability of offenders to participate in the Criminal Justice Diversion Program (CJDP), there is a risk of inconsistency in the identification of suitable CJDP candidates. The development of such criteria for Victoria Police would reduce the potential inconsistencies in determining the eligibility of offenders to participate in CJDP.

Key recommendation

- MCV should provide Victoria Police with clear criteria to determine the eligibility and suitability of offenders to participate in CJDP (**Recommendation 5.1**).

5.1 Needs identification

A range of circumstances contribute to youth offending. As such, processes that effectively assess a young offender's behaviour and needs will enable appropriate services and interventions to be identified and delivered.

The audit examined assessment and needs identification practices and a selection of case files of the agencies under review to establish whether they had:

- standardised assessment processes to identify offenders' underlying risk factors, strengths and their risks of reoffending
- effectively engaged young offenders in the assessment process
- used staff with the requisite capabilities to identify young offender needs.

5.1.1 Department of Human Services

The Youth Justice and Youth Services Branch uses a standardised needs identification framework, at youth justice units and youth justice custodial centres, to make a holistic assessment of a young person's needs, risks, offending behaviour and strengths that could contribute to their rehabilitation.

In 2002, DHS commissioned a review of its assessment tool for determining the needs of young offenders. The review recommended a best practice model of evidence-based offender rehabilitation, where the type and intensity of program intervention is determined by the young person's level of reoffending risk, based on an assessment of risks factors and needs most linked to offending or recidivism. As a result, DHS developed a needs identification framework that is referred to as the *Client Assessment Plan (CAP)* and includes these components:

- **Client Assessment Summary (CAS)**—which provides information about a young person's background and factors contributing to their offending behaviour.
- **Victorian Offender Needs Indicator for Youth (VONIY)**—which summarises a young person's offending profile and is used to determine the level of intervention required, including low, moderate, high or intensive interventions, to address their identified needs. Staff can override the indicated intervention level, if the nature of the offence, such as a sexual offence, requires an intensive level of intervention.
- **Client Service Plan (CSP)**—which identifies the goals to be achieved by the young offender and provides the framework for case management.

The use of VONIY represents best practice as a risk and needs assessment tool. Other Australian states and territories are now developing similar tools, and South Australia, Western Australia, Tasmania and the Australian Capital Territory have approached Victoria for VONIY.

Youth justice units

Our review of a selection of case files of youth justice unit clients identified that:

- CAP was used consistently to identify the needs of young offenders
- completion of CAP occurs within six weeks of admission
- VONIY was used uniformly to identify both the young person's history and risk factors affecting their offending behaviour
- young people were effectively engaged in the assessment process to identify their needs and goals to be addressed through their rehabilitation.

To ensure staff are adequately equipped to conduct client assessments—that is, applying CAP—all new youth justice unit staff undergo induction training, including a three-day practice clinic, which introduces staff to the client assessment and case management framework.

Youth justice custodial centres

Needs identification for young people in custody is a staged process. The audit reviewed needs assessment practices and a selection of case files at all three youth justice custodial centres and found that:

- a needs assessment occurs within 24 hours of admission or within 12 hours for indigenous clients. Placement of sentenced clients is determined on the basis of the level of security required and the client's vulnerability
- CAP was used consistently to identify the needs of young offenders and is completed within six weeks of admission
- there is consistent use of VONIY to identify risks, strengths and factors that may contribute to reoffending
- an educational assessment is generally undertaken within two weeks of admission
- needs assessments also occurs for specific purposes, such as determining a client's suitability for temporary leave program and making progress reports for the Youth Parole Board.

However, youth justice custodial centre staff advised audit that, in some circumstances, it is difficult to access reliable client information about the profile and behaviours of young people being admitted to custodial centres. An example of this was the reluctance of the external health provider for the Parkville and Melbourne custodial centres to pass on personal health-related information and concerns about individual privacy. Consequently, it becomes necessary to obtain information directly from the client or from family members. The rehabilitation of the young offender is the primary issue and DHS should implement measures that ensure the timely and accurate flow of information so offenders' needs and intervention/treatment strategies can be identified without delay.

Needs identification

The audit found good practice in the assessment process at the Malmsbury Youth Custodial Centre where assessments are undertaken within a designated admissions unit. Clients are observed by health staff for two to three weeks to assess their adjustment to the custodial centre. This had benefits as health workers are actively involved in completing CAP, delivering an integrated needs assessment and care planning for young offenders in the centre.

A review of educational and vocational delivery, commissioned by DHS, identified better practice through the use of a comprehensive range of assessment tools to identify client needs and case management practices. A similar educational review is being conducted for Melbourne and Parkville Custodial Centres which is anticipated to lead to changes in assessment practices and program delivery.

Health and educational services are contracted to external providers at the Parkville or Melbourne Custodial Centres. The audit identified that:

- the health service provider is not actively engaged in CAP process and better communication with custodial staff would improve needs assessment and case management
- there is a lack of documentation regarding the outcomes from the educational assessment process, as these are verbally communicated to case managers resulting in variability in the level of information recorded in the Client Relationship Information System (CRIS).

Custodial staff also advised that there were limited opportunities for them to undertake case management training. The Youth Justice Custodial Services branch is addressing this issue through an induction program in case management practices for custodial centre staff piloted in April 2008.

Adult Court Advice and Support Service

The Adult Court Advice and Support Service (ACAS) staff assesses the suitability of young persons appearing in court for:

- placement in a youth justice custodial centres
- bail and supervised bail.

The audit reviewed ACAS's needs assessment practices and a selection of case files.

ACAS uses a standardised tool to assess the suitability of young offenders for placement in youth justice custodial centres. It is used to assess the potential for rehabilitation and their level of vulnerability if they are subject to a term in an adult prison. This process provides an understanding of the young offender's risks and strengths and likelihood to reoffend.

The review of case files identified that practices used to assess the suitability of young offenders for supervised bail lacked a systematic assessment process. The audit identified that documentation in case files was incomplete as evidence supporting recommendations for supervised bail were not recorded. This has been identified by DHS who are developing a standard format for the documented bail plan, reviewing the current bail assessment tool and providing training to all ACAS staff in May 2008.

Magistrates indicated that the outcomes for young offenders could be improved by placing them into ACAS supervised bail program at an earlier stage so they can access services which will not only address their identified risks and needs, but also may prevent further offending while on bail. Magistrates suggested that this could be achieved by enabling Victoria Police to refer young offenders directly to the supervised bail program on charging them with an offence.

Under current arrangements, DHS is funded to provide services through the supervised bail program once young offenders are referred to the program by the courts. Direct referral to the program by Victoria Police may raise issues regarding the suitability of potential clients, and would also impact on the ability of DHS to deliver services within their current resource allocation.

Conclusion

DHS has standardised assessment processes to determine the needs of young offenders by:

- identifying the underlying risk factors that contribute to offending behaviour and the risk of reoffending
- engaging young persons in the assessment process.

The needs identification processes at the Melbourne and Parkville Custodial Centres can be improved by facilitating:

- better communication and information sharing between government agencies and custodial centre staff regarding the profile of young offenders
- greater involvement of external health and educational service providers and custodial centre staff to improve the needs identification process.

Young offenders access support services through the supervised bail program following their referral by the courts. Accelerating access to the program, by direct referral of clients by Victoria Police, would need to be assessed to determine whether this improved outcomes for young offenders.

5.1.2 Magistrates' Court of Victoria

Criminal Justice Diversion Program

In most cases before the Magistrates' Court of Victoria (MCV), a matter cannot be considered for the Criminal Justice Diversion Program (CJDP) without the consent of the prosecution, which is, in most cases, the Victoria Police. However, there is no guidance for Victoria Police to draw upon when considering the suitability of an offender for CJDP. Further, the absence of clear guidance may disadvantage some offenders and result in their exclusion from the program.

When an offender is accepted into CJDP, MCV diversion coordinators collate relevant information about the offender through interviews. The audit found that young offenders are positively engaged in this process. This information is provided to magistrates and is used to determine the conditions of the offender's diversion plan. However, diversion coordinators may refer young offenders to undertake a needs assessment if it is established that, following consultation with police, the offender presents with a higher level of risk or needs that require specialised treatment or counselling.

We examined the conduct of CJDP needs assessment process at the Neighbourhood Justice Centre (NJC) in Collingwood. At NJC, offenders are referred for a needs assessment, when required, by range of other government service providers, including mental health, alcohol and drug and housing services that are located at NJC. In these circumstances, the presiding magistrate is able to consider an assessment of the offender's identified risks and needs when deciding the conditions of the diversion plan.

Conclusions

In the absence of criteria to assess the suitability of offenders to participate in CJDP, there is a risk of inconsistency in the identification of suitable CJDP candidates. The development of such criteria for Victoria Police would reduce the potential inconsistencies in determining the eligibility of offenders to participate in CJDP.

Good practice in the assessment of offenders' risks and needs was identified at NJC where young offenders, when required, are referred for assessment to co-located allied government service providers.

Recommendation

-
- 5.1 MCV should provide Victoria Police with clear criteria to determine the eligibility and suitability of offenders to participate in CJDP.
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6 Case management and service delivery

At a glance

Background

Delivering services to rehabilitate and address young offenders' needs requires an integrated case management approach by government and other service providers.

Key findings

Youth justice units and youth justice custodial centres use effective case management practices to:

- establish clear aims and objectives for young offenders
- match the level of interventions with the assessed level of risk
- meet the needs of indigenous offenders through Koori justice programs
- support the reintegration of young offenders' into the community.

The Criminal Justice Diversion Program has effective processes in place to ensure that young offenders become aware of the consequences of their behaviour and provide restitution to their victims and the community. Victims are involved at all stages of the diversion process and have the opportunity to provide input into the development of the diversion plan and feedback on the diversion outcomes.

Key recommendation

- DHS should:
 - ensure that young offenders agree and sign off against the goals and objectives identified in their client services plans
 - implement appropriate systems to clearly and consistently document a young offender's progress towards their case management goals
 - review the effectiveness of parole planning and post-release programs to facilitate access to support services and the reintegration of young offenders returning to rural and remote areas
 - develop a standardised service plan for the management of young offenders on supervised bail (**Recommendation 6.1**).

6.1 Integrated case management and service delivery

Delivering services to help rehabilitate and address the needs of young offenders requires government and other service providers to take an integrated approach to case management and service delivery.

In this part of the audit we examined case management practices and the extent to which services and interventions were aligned to the factors causing offending behaviour, the risks of reoffending and the identified needs of young offenders. The audit also examined whether there was effective pre- and post-release support provided to enable young offenders released from custodial supervision to reintegrate into the community.

6.1.1 Department of Human Services

Youth justice units

The audit identified good practice in the management of young offenders' cases and in the delivery of services at youth justice units.

Case planning—the review of a selection of case files confirmed that all young offenders have Client Services Plan (CSP) and an allocated case worker. CSP details individual goals and provides a basis for the coordination of interventions/services required to address the underlying issues that contribute to offending behaviour. DHS ensure young offenders actively participate in the development of CSPs. The additional practice of seeking the young person's signature to the plan is considered better practice and should be further promoted across the program.

There were areas of the case planning process that could be improved by:

- using plain English so that young offenders can better understand the requirements of their case plans
- ensuring that all young offenders sign off their case planning goals
- ensuring that appropriate systems are in place to clearly and consistently document a young offender's progress towards their case management goals.

Intensity of case management—is determined through the Victorian Offender Needs Indicator for Youth (VONIY), which is used to match the intensity of the intervention to the young person's assessed level of need and risk. Case managers of high-risk offenders are able to override the level of intervention recommended through VONIY to ensure that such offenders receive the required level of intervention.

Access to services—the review of case management practices and case files found that CSPs include information on referrals and linkages with government agencies and community organisations that provide services, including drug and alcohol, housing, or family violence programs, to address the needs and risks identified through the needs identification process.

Challenging offending behaviour—Youth justice workers focus on challenging offending behaviour through structured casework interventions and the application of the Changing Habits and Reaching Targets program. Through this program young offenders receive training to apply problem-solving skills, effective coping strategies and to think about the consequences of their actions to assist them to modify and maintain behaviour changes and prevent relapse. The influence on offenders' behaviour was documented on case files.

Supporting indigenous clients—Koori justice programs provide support and supervision for young Koori offenders on community-based orders and in youth custodial centres. Through these programs, Koori justice workers act as role models for young Koori offenders and provide culturally sensitive support and advocacy and case work.

In terms of service planning, all young Koori offenders are offered the opportunity to have a community representative present at their client assessment and planning meeting. Koori agencies consulted as part of this audit indicated they are appropriately engaged in the youth justice process and that the needs of young Koori offenders are being met in a culturally sensitive manner.

Workforce development—Case management is underpinned by the recruitment of qualified staff. DHS has pre-entry standards for youth justice workers, including Bachelor of Social Work, Associate Diploma in Welfare Studies or other tertiary qualifications appropriate to welfare practice. Induction training is provided to new youth workers by DHS and includes assessment practices and the use of VONIY.

Youth justice custodial centres

The audit identified good practice in the management of young offenders' cases and in the delivery of services at youth justice custodial centres. Good practice included:

Case planning—Case planning at youth justice custodial centres is underpinned by the uses of CSP, with service delivery coordinated by allocated key workers who are responsible for implementing case plans.

Intensity of case management—The review of a selection of case files showed that the level and nature of interventions reflected the assessed level of client risks and needs. For example, high-risk clients at the Parkville Custodial Centre rated as requiring an intensive level of intervention were characterised by significantly more temporary leaves for counselling and other specialist interventions.

Access to services—Is organised by custodial staff and young offenders who jointly identify their educational and recreational interests. The custodial centres have formalised relationships with TAFEs, schools and educational providers, with services provided onsite. Audit found that young offenders were consistently supported to access to a wide range of services aimed at developing life skills. Offenders are also able to access employment opportunities outside the centres through access to leave.

The Malmesbury Custodial Centre has its own facility that delivers health services and intervention programs. This accorded with better practice because health service delivery was fully integrated into the overarching case management process. By contrast, health services at the Parkville and Melbourne Custodial Centres are contracted and there is limited involvement of health staff with custodial staff in case planning for young offenders.

Supporting indigenous clients—Custodial centres have formal links to indigenous community representatives and there are clear guidelines for the case management of indigenous clients with Koori support workers engaged at all stages of in the case management process.

Workforce development—Is being addressed through the Youth Justice Custodial Services plan, which has identified training needs for custodial staff.

Pre- and post-release transition—Support to reintegrate young offenders back into the community is provided by regional youth justice staff in conjunction with the young offenders and custodial staff, resulting in the development of a parole plan.

Pre-release support

A key element of pre-release support for young offenders in custody is the Temporary Leave Program, which supports young offenders' rehabilitation and reintegration back into the community. Temporary leave enables young offenders to participate in a range of activities, including employment, education and training, visits with family and friends, and meeting with counsellors and health treatment services that will provide support after their release from custody.

In 2007 DHS commissioned an evaluation of the Temporary Leave Program. Its key findings were that young offenders who participated in the program:

- showed improvements in relationships with family and peers
- gained a better standard of accommodation after release from custody
- were more likely to persevere with work.

Post-release support

Parole is an essential post-release support provided to young offenders in custody. Through parole orders young offenders are able to serve part of a custodial sentence in the community under the supervision of parole workers.

Our review of selected case files identified that parole plans facilitate the transition of a young offender back into the community and include:

- proposed accommodation arrangements
- referral to services aimed at reducing reoffending behaviour
- referrals to services aimed at addressing identified needs and employment and training opportunities.

The audit found that when community-based youth justice workers worked with young offenders following their release from custodial supervision, the offender's reintegration into the community was enhanced by encouraging their continuation of training courses, helping them to maintain family relationships, and preparing them to undertake job interviews.

Access to support services post-release

Parole planning was more difficult when the young offender returned to a region distant from the custodial centre. In these cases, there is the risk that the young offender would not have the opportunity to access post-release services or build rapport with their regional youth justice worker prior to parole.

The Youth Parole Board's Annual Report for 2006–07 stated that there can be difficulties in accessing appropriate services in rural areas, including accommodation services, particularly for those with a disability and mental health issues. This may result in parole being delayed or resulting in a level of support that is insufficient to ensure the effective reintegration of the young offender into the community.

In recognition of this, DHS is implementing a new service delivery model for community sector agencies that is designed to provide better access to services for young offenders at the regional level.

Adult Court Advice and Support Service

The Adult Court Advice and Support Service (ACAS) practice guidelines govern the management of young offenders on supervised bail, facilitate referrals and access to community-based services, and assist young offenders to demonstrate their progress over the bail period.

Case planning—Case planning and management would be improved by requiring that all young offenders under ACAS supervision have a management plan. In recognition of this, DHS is:

- developing a standard format for a bail plan for young people at risk of breaching bail or reoffending. Once completed this may be incorporated into the Client Relationship Information System as a standard management process
- reviewing current bail assessment 'tools' to develop a standard risk and needs assessment tool.

Intensity of case management—ACAS uses an age and developmentally appropriate approach to determine the level of services required to address the identified risks and needs of young offenders who are placed on supervised bail.

Access to services—ACAS adequately facilitates access to services through:

- the provision of advice in relation to bail support services, including accommodation, appropriate treatment or program availability
- liaison with judges and magistrates, legal personnel and court support services to coordinate the referral of young offenders to relevant community services
- assistance to identify appropriate diversionary strategies.

Challenging offending behaviour—ACAS provides adequate case management and supervises the progress made by young offenders to meet the conditions of their placement, and the extent to which they demonstrate a change in behaviour. This includes the completion of specified tasks over the period of supervision, actively sustaining employment or abstaining from alcohol or drug use.

Conclusion

Through their client service plans, the case management practices of youth justice units and youth justice custodial centres:

- establish clear aims and objectives for young offenders
- match the intensity of interventions with the assessed level of risk of reoffending
- provide a range of services to address offenders' risks, needs and anti-social attitudes and behaviours and raise an awareness of victims
- meet the needs of indigenous offenders through Koori justice programs
- provide pre- and post-release support to facilitate the reintegration of young offenders into the community.

Case management could be further improved by:

- enhancing the capability of youth justice custodial staff through case management training
- enhancing the quality and consistency of assessment documentation used in CSPs and requiring that young offenders signoff against their identified rehabilitative goals at youth justice units.

Pre-release programs provided to young offenders support their rehabilitation and reintegration back into the community. However, in rural areas there are particular difficulties in parole planning and accessing services post-release. This can delay support or result in insufficient levels of support to assist the effective reintegration of young offenders into the community.

Recommendation

6.1 DHS should:

- ensure that young offenders agree and sign off against the goals and objectives identified in their client service plans
- implement appropriate systems to clearly and consistently document a young offenders' progress towards their case management goals
- review the effectiveness of parole planning and post-release programs to facilitate access to support services and the reintegration of young offenders returning to rural and remote areas
- develop a standardised service plan for the management of young offenders on supervised bail.

6.1.2 Magistrates' Court of Victoria

Criminal Justice Diversion Program

The Criminal Justice Diversion Program (CJDP) focuses on:

- holding offenders accountable for their actions so they show remorse and make restitution
- linking offenders with interventions that address their identified needs, prevent reoffending and diverting progress through the youth and adult justice system.

Case planning—Prior to any appearance before a magistrate, diversion coordinators interview offenders to identify services required to address their risks and needs. A diversion plan is developed which specifies conditions that may require the offender to undertake rehabilitation or to attend counselling to address identified needs.

In many cases, diversion coordinators rely on the offender to identify issues of relevance to them. As stated earlier in this report, given the relative immaturity of young offenders, this process may present additional difficulties to diversion coordinators to identify services that are needed to address the underlying causes of their offending behaviour and assist in their rehabilitation.

Needs identification and case management were not an issue at the Neighbourhood Justice Centre (NJC) in Collingwood. Diversion coordinators refer offenders to other government service providers co-located at NJC for a needs assessment and referral services and interventions required to address their identified risks and needs.

Intensity of case management—Case management of offenders placed on diversion is not as intense as that provided to offenders on community-based orders and those under custodial supervision. This is because diversionary clients are assessed at a lower level of risk.

Access to services—Diversion coordinators refer clients to services identified in the diversion plan as determined by the court. This involves either a direct referral to the service provider or requires the offender to make contact with the service provider themselves. Diversion coordinators stated that they have arrangements in place with local service providers who work with offenders on diversion, such as the Salvation Army or local community health services.

Challenging offending behaviour—CJDP has a strong emphasis on demonstrating remorse and making appropriate restitution. Letters of apology to the victim and/or victim compensation are the most frequently used conditions in diversion plans. Other conditions, such as community work and donations are also used to make restitution for offending behaviour.

Importantly, victims are engaged in CJDP and they can provide input into the determination of the diversion conditions, may be present at the hearing or receive feedback about the outcomes of the diversion. At the completion of the diversion plan, feedback from the victim on their satisfaction with the process is also sought.

If the offender does not successfully complete the diversion conditions and/or attend rehabilitation or counselling services as required, the matter is referred back to the Mention Court of the Magistrates' Court of Victoria, as if the matter was being listed for the first time. All information regarding the diversion is removed from the file and the offender risks having a criminal conviction recorded if found guilty of the offence.

Conclusion

Young offenders participating in CJDP are usually assessed as being low risk and so do not typically receive intensive case management.

CJDP has effective processes in place to ensure that young offenders become aware of the consequences of their behaviour and provide restitution to their victims and the community. Victims are involved at all stages of the diversion process and have the opportunity to provide input into the development of the diversion plan and feedback on the diversion outcomes.

7 Information systems

At a glance

Background

Planning, coordination and delivery of services to young offenders need to be underpinned by adequate information and data collection systems.

Key findings

The Client Relationship Information System (CRIS) does not currently provide sufficient analytical data to management on the effectiveness of interventions and services in rehabilitating young offenders and reducing rates of reoffending. The Department of Human Services (DHS) is improving the functionality of CRIS to enable greater data interrogation and more flexible and tailored management reporting. The management reporting capability of CRIS can be improved through the alignment of planned interventions and services with the achievement of assessed outcomes for young offenders and the outcomes for the youth justice program as a whole.

DHS now records the Justice Accused Identification Number (JAID number) within CRIS. A JAID number is allocated by Victoria Police to an individual when they are charged. This will facilitate the cross-system tracking of a young offender should they progress through the youth justice and adult criminal justice systems, and future data sharing that could be used for longitudinal research on young offenders.

Data collection and information systems related to the Criminal Justice Diversion Program inform planning and program development as they identify the number of cases heard, offending behaviour and the conditions of diversion to be monitored by the Magistrates' Court of Victoria and the Department of Justice.

Key recommendation

- DHS should enhance the management reporting capability of CRIS to identify:
 - trends in the needs of young offenders
 - the effectiveness of interventions and services in meeting the assessed needs of young offenders and modifying their behaviour
 - the extent to which interventions and services contribute to the rehabilitation of young offenders and reduced recidivism. **(Recommendation 7.1)**

7.1 Information systems

The planning, coordination and delivery of services to young offenders are underpinned by information and data collection systems. Effective information systems are necessary to manage service delivery and to identify opportunities to improve strategic and operational planning and performance.

7.1.1 Department of Human Services

Information and data relating to young offenders is maintained and managed through the Department of Human Services' (DHS) Client Relationship Information System (CRIS). The system supports the work undertaken by youth justice units, youth justice custodial centres and the Adult Court Advice and Support Service (ACAS). CRIS is an integrated electronic client information and case management system that was introduced in 2006. It captures data collected through the needs assessment and case management processes.

Although CRIS is used by a number of DHS program areas, including child protection, disability services and youth justice, electronic information sharing does not routinely occur where there are shared clients. DHS cited the provisions of the *Privacy Act 2000* and the *Children Youth and Families Act 2005* as constraining information sharing in regard to young offenders.

Notwithstanding these legal constraints, there is a need for DHS to explore options to maximise the flow of information between these program areas to facilitate joint planning and improved continuity of care to meet the needs of clients they have in common. It would also be in the interests of DHS to take advantage of potential efficiencies and savings to be achieved through enhanced information sharing.

CRIS is limited to providing information collected through the needs identification and case management processes. It does not currently provide sufficient analytical data to management on the effectiveness of interventions and services in rehabilitating young offenders and reducing rates of reoffending. DHS is improving the functionality of CRIS to enable greater data interrogation and more flexible and tailored management reporting. The management reporting capability of CRIS can be improved through the alignment of planned interventions and services with the achievement of assessed outcomes for individual young offenders and the outcomes for the youth justice program as a whole.

Conclusion

Improving the quality of management reporting through the use of evidence-based analysis will enhance case management of young offenders by facilitating improved planning, coordination and targeting of interventions and services.

Recommendation

7.1 DHS should enhance the management reporting capability of CRIS to identify:

- trends in the needs of young offenders
- the effectiveness of interventions and services in meeting the assessed needs of young offenders and modifying their behaviour
- the extent to which interventions and services contribute to the rehabilitation of young offenders and reduced recidivism.

7.1.2 Magistrates' Court of Victoria

In relation to the Criminal Justice Diversion Program (CJDP) extensive data is collected through the Parallel Services Court Management System and is used for management reporting within the Magistrates' Court of Victoria (MCV) and for reporting by MCV to the Department of Justice (DoJ).

As part of the overall operations of MCV, the performance of the diversion program is monitored by the chief executive officer through monthly meetings with the principal registrar and senior registrars in courts. The chief executive officer also releases a monthly newsletter that is based on the extensive data collected and includes information on:

- the operation of the diversion program at various court locations
- the number of diversion cases heard and referrals to services
- donations, restitution and voluntary work undertaken by offenders
- the nature of conditions, including counselling and treatment services, specified in diversion plans and undertaken by offenders.

Conclusion

CJDP data collection and information systems adequately inform planning and program development as they identify changes in terms of the number of cases heard, offending behaviour and the conditions of diversion.

7.1.3 Whole-of-government

The policy *A Balanced Approach to Juvenile Justice in Victoria*, announced in August 2000, stated that improved data systems would be developed across the youth justice program and across other agencies involved in youth justice. Currently, the information systems of DHS and DoJ, and those of other government agencies involved in the delivery of youth justice services operate separately.

However, DHS now records the Justice Accused Identification Number (JAID number) within CRIS. A JAID number is allocated by Victoria Police to an individual when they are charged. Recording the JAID number in CRIS is mandatory field that must be completed by all youth justice staff. This will facilitate the cross-system tracking of a young offender should they progress through the youth justice and adult criminal justice systems. The recording of the JAID number in CRIS will facilitate future data sharing between DHS and DoJ and could be used for longitudinal research on young offenders to identify:

- the nature of offences they commit
- the programs and service interventions that they access
- trends in reoffending.

Conclusion

A whole-of-government approach to data standards, collection and analysis that is underpinned by consistent information collection and transmission between the youth justice and adult criminal justice systems should be developed. This would support shared needs identification, planning and coordination of service delivery, continuity in service provision across program areas and ongoing service development.

Recommendation

- 7.2 DHS, in conjunction with other State Government departments and agencies involved in the delivery of youth justice services, should develop a whole-of-government approach to data collection and analysis to support shared planning and service development. This should be complemented by arrangements to support effective information sharing within and across agencies.
-



Efficiency and effectiveness of services

At a glance

Background

Agencies providing services to young offenders should be able to demonstrate the extent to which the services provided have been efficient and effective in achieving improved outcomes.

Key findings

The Department of Human Services (DHS) has not conducted periodic research to assess changes in the rate of youth reoffending over time. Therefore, audit cannot provide any assurance as to whether the Juvenile Justice Reform Strategy has effectively reduced the likelihood of reoffending.

Recognising the need to measure outcomes achieved by individual youth justice programs, and the system as a whole, DHS recently commissioned the Australian Institute of Criminology to advise on appropriate outcome-based measures for the youth justice system.

In the absence of a definitive evaluation of the effectiveness of the Juvenile Justice Reform Strategy, we analysed DHS data and a subset of performance data for 10 to 17-year-old offenders. Consistent with the objectives of the Juvenile Justice Reform Strategy, we found a reduction in the number of young offenders serving custodial sentences in Victoria between 2000–01 and 2007–08 and they are being diverted from progression into the youth justice systems.

Key recommendation

- DHS should:
 - ensure that outcome measures being developed by the Australian Institute of Criminology adequately assess the effectiveness of youth justice programs and services in reducing reoffending and improving rehabilitation
 - assess the feasibility of using the Victorian Offender Needs Indicator for Youth to enable the effectiveness of youth justice programs, services and interventions aimed at rehabilitating young offenders to be measured.

(Recommendation 8.2)

8.1 Cost of service provision

The cost of providing services to young offenders through the youth justice units and youth justice custodial centres, the Adult Court Advice and Support Service (ACAS) and the Criminal Justice Diversion Program (CJDP) is shown in Figure 8A.

Figure 8A
Cost of services to young offenders (\$ Million)

Service	2005–06	2006–07	2007–08 (Budget)
DHS Youth Justice Units and Adult Court Advice and Support Service ^(a)	23.5	25.0	26.6
DHS Youth Justice Custodial Centres	34.2	34.7	33.4
Criminal Justice Diversion Program	1.043	0.992	0.969

Note: (a) This funding is inclusive of additional services delivered to young people.

Source: The Department of Human Services, the Department of Justice and the Magistrates' Court of Victoria, *Annual Reports, 2005–06 and 2006–07*.

The cost of providing services to young offenders by the Department of Human Services (DHS) and the delivery of CJDP by the Magistrates' Court of Victoria (MCV) have remained stable over the period 2005–06 to 2007–08.

8.2 Efficiency

This part of the audit sought to establish whether there were systems in place to monitor and manage service delivery costs and resource utilisation. We expected to find expenditure control systems that were used to monitor, compare and benchmark the unit costs of services and to adjust where necessary, the allocation of available resources to reflect service demands.

In examining whether services to young offenders are delivered efficiently, the audit examined whether agency financial systems provide for:

- planning and allocation of costs and resource requirements
- monitoring and reporting of the cost of service delivery and resource utilisation
- assurance that service costs and resources are utilised for their intended purpose
- benchmarking against comparable program services.

8.2.1 Department of Human Services

Youth justice units and the Adult Court Advice and Support Service

The delivery of services by the youth justice units and ACAS is managed by DHS through its regional budgeting and financial management and reporting systems. Financial oversight of youth justice units and ACAS is the responsibility of the regional manager of the community care portfolio.

Regarding budgetary and financial controls over the planning and delivery of services through youth justice units and ACAS, the audit established that:

- estimates of the cost of service delivery primarily reflect salaries and associated on-costs, operating expenses and the allocation of regional overheads
- service costs and staff numbers are monitored monthly against budget estimates
- quarterly reporting requirements to the Estimates Review Committee and the Department of Treasury and Finance (DTF) on the progress towards the achievement of output targets as stated in *Budget Paper No. 3, Service Delivery*. This reporting mechanism acts to ensure that expenditure is applied against the delivery of services that agencies were funded to provide
- services can be benchmarked against each other through the provision of comparative data received under the *Youth Justice Reporting Project*, which provides quarterly reporting to management on a suite of custodial and community-based services performance measures.

Youth justice custodial units

Similar forms of cost and resource control were identified for the youth justice custodial centres. Each centre is managed by a chief executive officer who reports to the director of youth justice custodial services. As in the youth justice units management reporting focuses on monitoring human resources and service delivery costs. Youth justice custodial centres are required to maintain custodial staff on a 24-hour basis. Staffing costs and utilisation rates are managed against budgeted allocations.

The Youth Services and Youth Justice branch provided examples of efficiency-based information which is being trialled by youth justice custodial centres and youth justice units includes: Community-based order cost per day per client (Figure 8B) and youth justice custodial centres cost per bed per day (Figure 8C).

Figure 8B
Youth justice unit's client cost per day (2006–07)

Region	Community-based order cost per client per day (\$)
Eastern	22.20
North Western	28.10
Southern	14.30
Barwon South West	19.80
Gippsland	24.10
Grampians	21.70
Hume	18.80
Loddon Mallee	29.00

Source: Department of Human Services.

Figure 8C
Youth justice custodial centres cost per capacity (2006–07)

Custodial centre	Cost per unit of capacity (bed) per day (\$)
Malmsbury	424.50
Melbourne	500.60
Parkville	408.70

Source: Department of Human Services.

DHS advised that the use of efficiency information to manage services and monitor service costs and resource utilisation is in the early stages of development.

Nevertheless, the information described above presents DHS with the basis to:

- analyse the drivers of unit costs for community-based orders and custodial centres
- identify better practices in service delivery to be incorporated by regions or custodial centres, which may reduce the unit cost of providing services.

8.2.2 Magistrates' Court of Victoria

Criminal Justice Diversion Program

MCV and the Department of Justice (DoJ) are jointly involved in the budget process and funding is provided in accordance with DoJ output delivery targets. Most funding to MCV is non-discretionary and is attributable to salaries and associated on-costs (around 85 per cent) and operational expenses. MCV monitors program costs and staffing numbers monthly and results are forwarded to DoJ. By reporting against DoJ's output targets, DoJ and DTF closely monitor MCV budget to ensure that actual expenditure is in accordance with the purposes for which it was provided.

Conclusion

Managing the efficiency of the delivery of youth justice services and CJDP is minimal, however DHS is working towards developing and implementing efficiency measures and benchmarking services with interstate jurisdictions.

The development of efficiency measures would assist with the benchmarking of the delivery of CJDP between individual courts and between regions. Such information could be used to identify examples of better practice, which if implemented across the system, may result in the achievement of cost savings or improved operations.

Recommendation

8.1 DHS, DoJ and MCV should:

- expedite the development of benchmark data to measure operational efficiency
- incorporate output data into operational management reports that track output cost rates
- review output and unit cost data to form a baseline against which current performance can be assessed.

8.3 Effectiveness

The Juvenile Justice Reform Strategy aimed to achieve the following outcomes for young offenders:

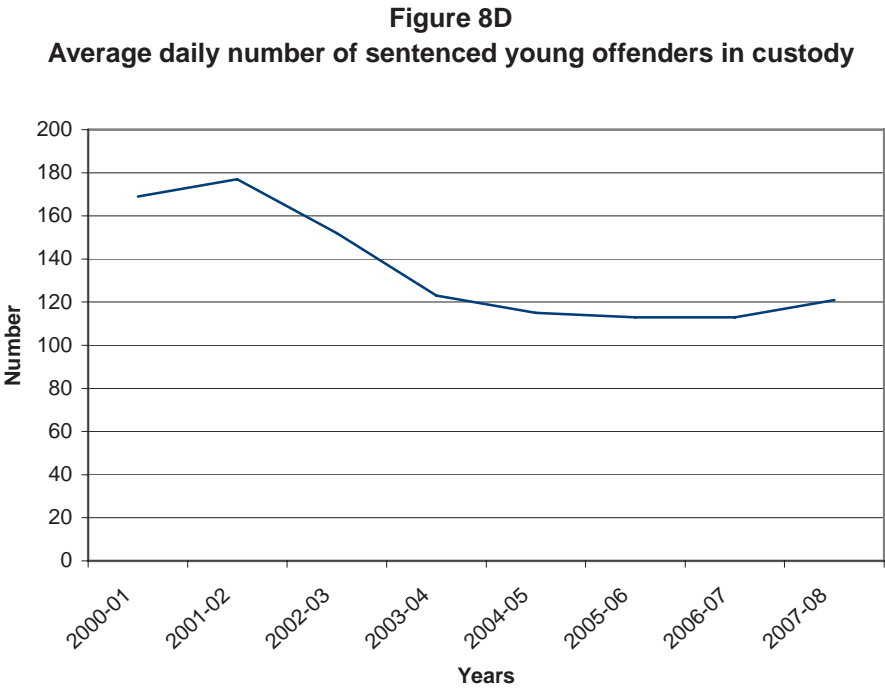
- diversion from the youth justice system or minimising progression into the youth justice or adult systems
- increased access to pre-release, transition and post-release support programs
- reduced likelihood of reoffending
- better rehabilitation of high-risk offenders.

This section focuses on whether DHS and MCV/DoJ are able to demonstrate that the services provided to young offenders have been effective in improving outcomes as detailed in Juvenile Justice Reform Strategy and the objectives of CJDP.

8.3.1 Department of Human Services

Diversion and minimising progression into the justice system

Diversionary strategies, including the focus on community-based orders and the introduction of ACAS, aimed to divert or minimise the progression of young offenders through the justice system. Given this diversionary emphasis, Victoria has reduced the number of young offenders serving custodial sentences. This is illustrated in Figure 8D.



Source: Department of Human Services.

Over the period 2000–01 to 2007–08, the average daily number of young offenders in custody in Victoria has fallen from 169 to 121, a reduction of 28 per cent. This achievement meets one of the goals of the Juvenile Justice Reform Strategy, which was introduced in August 2000, to divert the number of young offenders in custody. Audit also reviewed data compiled by the Australian Institute of Criminology and found that Victoria had the lowest rate per capita of young persons, aged 10 to 17, serving custodial sentences in Australia.

This diversionary emphasis is also associated with a reduction, over time, in the total number of young people entering the youth justice system. As shown Figure 8E, between 2001–02 and 2005–06 there was an 11.4 per cent reduction in the number of young people aged 10 to 17 either in detention or on a community-based supervision order.

The rate at which young people were referred into youth justice supervision increased in 2005–06 when compared to 2004–05. This is accounted for because of the legislative change, which, from 1 July 2005, increased the upper limit of the age jurisdiction of the Children’s Court of Victoria from 17 to 18 years.

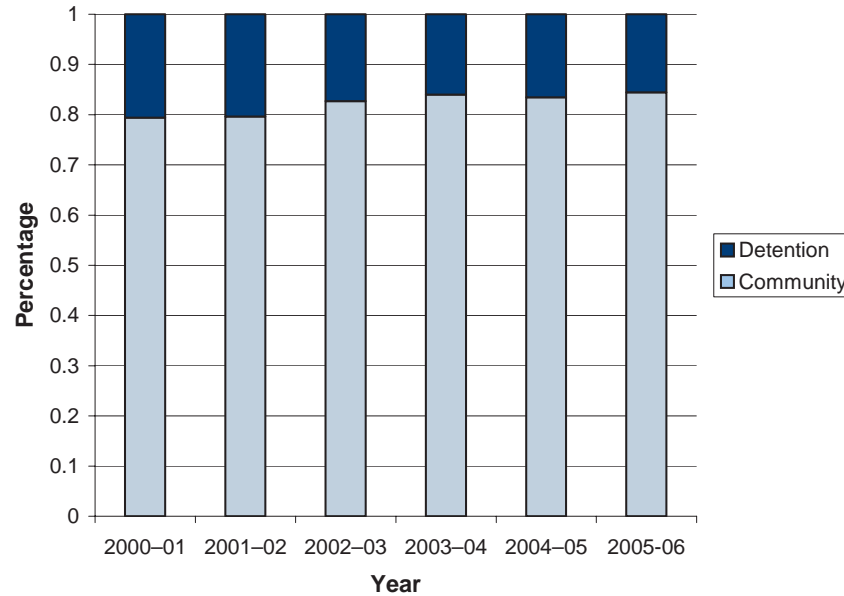
Figure 8E
Young people aged 10 to 17 in detention
or on community-based orders

Year	Number of young people in detention or on community-based orders	Percentage change
2000–01	1 506	
2001–02	1 547	2.7
2002–03	1 527	(1.3)
2003–04	1 501	(1.7)
2004–05	1 345	(10.4)
2005–06	1 371	1.9

Source: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2007, *Juvenile justice in Australia 2005–06, Juvenile justice series No. 3. Cat No. JUV 3*. Canberra, p. 25. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2007, *Juvenile justice in Australia 2004–05, Cat. No. JUV 2*, Canberra, p.26. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2007, *Juvenile justice in Australia 2000–01 to 2003–04, Cat. No. JUV 1*, Canberra, p. 24.

Importantly, and reflecting the intent of the Juvenile Justice Reform Strategy to reduce the number of young people in detention, Victoria has maintained a growth in the rate of young offenders (aged 10 to 17) on community-based supervision orders with a reduced rate of young offenders in detention over the period 2000–01 to 2005–06. This is demonstrated in Figure 8F.

Figure 8F
Average daily number of young people aged 10 to 17 on community-based orders or in detention for Victoria



Source: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2007, *Juvenile justice in Australia 2005-06, Juvenile justice series No. 3. Cat No. JUV 3*, Canberra, p. 49. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2007, *Juvenile justice in Australia 2004-05, Cat. No. JUV 2*, Canberra, p. 49.

Pre-release, transition and post-release support services

From 2001 to 2005, up to 69 per cent of young people received statutory parole supervision on release from youth justice custodial centres. The period of eligibility for parole was extended to include sentences of six months and over. Additional funding was also provided to post-release support agencies to increase the number of clients receiving post-release support.

While the audit found that access to pre-release, transition and post-release support programs has increased, measures to quantify the impact of the changes on client rehabilitation and recidivism have not been developed.

Reducing the likelihood of reoffending

An important indicator of the effectiveness of youth justice programs is the extent to which young offenders, after having been in the criminal justice system, do not return.

DHS has not conducted periodic research to assess changes in the rate of youth reoffending over time. Therefore, audit cannot provide any assurance as to whether the Juvenile Justice Reform Strategy has effectively reduced the likelihood of reoffending.

There are no evaluations of the performance of the youth justice system to compare performance with the system that existed prior to the introduction of the Juvenile Justice Reform Strategy. A study provided to audit was *Recidivism among Victorian Juvenile Justice Clients 1997–2001*. This study measured the reconviction of youth offenders within two years of completing a youth justice community-based or custodial orders and found about 50 per cent of young people were reconvicted after two years. However, as the study was undertaken shortly after the introduction of the Juvenile Justice Reform Strategy, it could not assess the strategy's impact on reoffending rates and the youth justice system overall.

Recognising the need to measure outcomes achieved by individual youth justice programs, and the system as a whole, DHS recently commissioned the Australian Institute of Criminology to advise on appropriate outcome-based measures for the youth justice system. Concurrently, the Australasian Juvenile Justice Administrators (AJJA) KPI working group is developing a set of national performance indicators for youth justice, including service system performance indicators, such as recidivism. Victoria is taking the lead role in this working group.

Maximising rehabilitation

Young people involved in the youth justice system tend to have a range of factors that have contributed to offending behaviour. In our review of a selection of case files, we saw that the needs of young offenders were being identified through individualised client assessment and linkages to services that matched identified risks. These case management processes were found to:

- systematically assess young people's key risks and needs
- match the intensity of interventions to the level of reoffending risk
- included measures to influence behaviour.

However, there has been no systematic assessment by DHS to measure changes in client behaviour, such as the reduction in anti-social behaviour or violence, over the course of youth justice supervision.

International studies indicate needs assessment instruments can be used to monitor the effectiveness of programs and supervision strategies in changing offenders' behaviour¹. Accordingly, DHS should determine whether the Victorian Offender Needs Indicator for Youth (VONIY), which is used to assess young offenders' needs, can be used to measure the effectiveness of programs and interventions aimed at rehabilitating young offenders over time.

¹ Bonta, J. (2002). Offender risk assessment: Guidelines for selection and use. *Criminal Justice and Behaviour*, 29, 355-379; Raynor, P., Kynch, J., Roberts, C., & Merrington, S. (2000). Risk and need assessment in probation services: an evaluation. Home Office Research Study No. 211. London, England: Home Office.

Conclusions

We analysed DHS data and a subset of performance data for 10 to 17-year-old offenders. Consistent with the objectives of the Juvenile Justice Reform Strategy, we found a reduction in the number of young offenders serving custodial sentences in Victoria between 2000–01 and 2007–08, and they are being diverted from progression into the youth justice systems. The data also shows that access to pre-release, transition and post-release support programs has increased.

It is difficult for Parliament and the community to assess the efficiency and effectiveness of services supporting the rehabilitation of young offenders and reducing reoffending, as a result of the limitations of outcome and performance measures. Given that reducing youth reoffending and improving rehabilitation are central objectives of the Juvenile Justice Reform Strategy announced in August 2000, developing outcome and performance measures should be a priority.

Recommendation

8.2 DHS should:

- ensure that outcome measures being developed by the Australian Institute of Criminology adequately assess the effectiveness of youth justice programs and services in reducing reoffending and improving rehabilitation
- assess the feasibility of using the Victorian Offender Needs Indicator for Youth to enable the effectiveness of youth justice programs, services and interventions aimed at rehabilitating young offenders to be measured.

8.3.2 Magistrates' Court of Victoria

The objectives of CJDP include:

- the prevention of reoffending
- diversion, defined as avoiding a first criminal conviction
- assisting rehabilitation
- supporting restitution to the victim and or community.

While young offenders make up an estimated 15 to 20 per cent of CJDP participants, there is no specific data available in relation to outcomes for the young offender cohort participating in CJDP.

Prevention of reoffending

A 2004 evaluation of CJDP indicated that less than 7 per cent of diversion participants reoffended within 12 months of exiting the program, while 17.5 per cent of a comparison group did reoffend. No further evaluative studies in this area have been undertaken. The capacity for monitoring and reporting outcome-based performance measurement of reoffending rates should be developed.

Diversion

One measure of the effectiveness of CJDP is the number of offenders successfully completing diversion plans and therefore avoiding a first criminal conviction. Data collected by MCV for 2006–07 shows that 5 637 offenders were placed on diversion plans with 91.3 per cent of offenders successfully completing the program by meeting the conditions specified in the diversion plans.

However, this is a weak measure of effectiveness as it primarily relates to the number of diversion plans successfully completed, and also includes offenders who have been previously convicted. Better measures of effectiveness are the extent to which offenders don't reoffend and the success of service/intervention referrals have in changing offender behaviour.

Supporting access to community resources

Offender referral and access to community-based treatment and services are monitored through CJDP. In 2006–07, the program facilitated 1 249 offender referrals to:

- defensive driving course (343 users)
- road trauma awareness program (265 users)
- counselling/treatment for drug use (189 users)
- counselling/treatment for alcohol use (110 users)
- counselling/treatment for gambling (11 users)
- counselling/treatment for other purposes (331 users).

While information is collected on the number and type of referrals of offenders for treatment/counselling, there is no data collected on the extent to which underlying issues contributing to offending behaviours, such as mental health and drug use, are subsequently addressed and the offender is rehabilitated.

Supporting restitution to the victim and/or community

CJDP has a strong emphasis on offenders demonstrating remorse and making appropriate restitution. Data collected by MCV demonstrates that during 2006–07, 1 973 apologies were made to victims and \$548 089 was paid by offenders in restitution, and over \$900 000 was donated to charities. Case files reviewed showed that in all cases where a victim was, in some way, injured a letter of apology formed part of the conditions of the diversion plan.

Victims also provide feedback regarding the operation of CJDP to MCV, however, audit did not find evidence to demonstrate that this information is reported to management or is used for continuous improvement of the program.

Conclusions

There is no data available in relation to outcomes for young offenders participating in CJDP. MCV's measures of the effectiveness of CJDP relate to all program participants, which includes both young offenders and adults.

MCV and DoJ need to develop routine outcome-based performance measurement to assess reoffending rates, the diversion of offenders from the justice system and the extent to which behaviours of offenders are modified.

Recommendations

- 8.3 MCV and DoJ should measure and report the number of young offenders accessing CJDP, the nature of service and intervention referrals that are made, and the number of diversion plans that are successfully completed.
 - 8.4 MCV should develop and implement outcome-based performance measures that assess the effectiveness of CJDP in:
 - achieving a sustained rate of reduction in reoffending and diversion of offenders from progressing through the justice system
 - rehabilitating offenders through referral to services and interventions that are aimed at changing their offending behaviours.
-

9 Service improvement

At a glance

Background

Agencies delivering youth justice services need to operate in a culture of continuous improvement to maintain the quality and responsiveness of their services to young offenders.

Key findings

The audit found that a number of independent reviews and program evaluations commissioned by the Department of Human Services (DHS) have led to significant improvements in the delivery of youth justice services.

A number of major reviews into the provision of youth justice services are underway. It is important that data are produced to demonstrate improvements in service system responsiveness and youth justice outcomes at the client, program and system levels.

The Criminal Justice Diversion Program (CJDP) has processes to obtain feedback from both offenders and victims. However, this information is not being used to support continuous improvement.

Key recommendations

- DHS should implement a structured client feedback mechanism at youth justice units and Adult Court Advice and Support Service that provides young offenders with the opportunity to provide input into the delivery of community-based services and supervision. **(Recommendation 9.1)**
- DHS should enhance its Client Relationship Information System to systematically collect and analyse data demonstrating the extent to which system-wide initiatives are improving responsiveness in service delivery and the achievement of client, program and system outcomes. **(Recommendation 9.2)**
- MCV should analyse information received on CJDP questionnaires, and report key findings. **(Recommendation 9.3)**

9.1 Continuous improvement

The offending behaviours of young people are influenced by numerous social and domestic factors. Their needs are also complex and change over time. In this environment it is important that government agencies involved in the delivery of youth justice services operate in a culture of continuous improvement to maintain the quality and responsiveness of services to young offenders.

The audit examined service improvement at the client, program and system levels.

9.1.1 Department of Human Services

Continuous improvement at the client level

There were differing approaches taken by youth justice units and youth justice custodial centres to engage young offenders to ascertain their views on the quality of service delivery.

In youth justice units, client feedback on the supervision process is collected on an ad hoc basis, however regular self audits of case files are undertaken to identify areas for improvement in service delivery.

At youth justice custodial centres there was a range of arrangements to enable young people to provide input into the supervision process including:

- grievance procedures about the standard of care, accommodation or treatment
- meetings between staff and young offenders discuss issues of concern and suggestions for service improvement.

A structured client feedback processes should be introduced for young offenders at youth justice units and for those under the Adult Court Advice and Support Service (ACAS) supervision.

Continuous improvement at the program level

DHS has implemented the Service Excellence Framework (SEF) to place an emphasis on building a culture of continuous quality improvement. SEF is based on the Australian Business Excellence Framework and was introduced by DHS across all regions and custodial services in 2004.

Management and staff from youth justice units and youth justice custodial centres stated that SEF was the mechanism through which continuous improvement occurs at the program level. Examples of service improvements delivered in custodial centres include: the implementation of a staff injury risk control tool; improved budget monitoring processes; implementation of a centralised staff induction process.

Conclusion

A number of operational and service improvements have been implemented across the youth justice custodial centres. Service improvement mechanisms have also been introduced at custodial centres that incorporate young offenders and custodial staff input into the quality review process. Nevertheless, youth justice units and ACAS lack a structured approach to incorporating client feedback into continuous improvement processes.

Recommendation

- 9.1 DHS should implement a structured client feedback mechanism at youth justice units and ACAS that provides young offenders with the opportunity to provide input into the delivery of community-based services and supervision.

Continuous improvement at the system level

The audit found that a number of independent reviews and program evaluations commissioned by DHS have led to significant improvements in the delivery of youth justice services. These include:

- the Rehabilitation Review, undertaken in 2003, which resulted in the development and implementation of the Victorian Offender Needs Indicator for Youth which is used to assess young offenders risk of reoffending and their underlying needs
- the development of a Case Management Framework, which identifies levels of intervention for young people according to their risk profile
- reviews into security and operational practices have reduced the number of escapes from custodial centres from 78 in 2000–01 to zero in 2006–07.

A range of reviews of youth justice services are currently in progress and are being undertaken in response to emerging service system gaps and a focus to improving system effectiveness. These reviews include the:

- review of the youth justice service delivery model
- Health Services Review
- Custodial Services Review

Review of the youth justice service delivery model

In 2007, the Youth Services and Youth Justice branch identified systemic issues in relation to the existing community-based service system, these issues include:

- a fragmented and disconnected system of service provision
- changes in the demographics of the youth offender client group and the relevance of the current services
- an increase in client numbers across all regions which relates to the change in age jurisdiction of the Children's Court of Victoria, which is placing additional demand pressure on the system
- use of historical funding arrangements which has resulted in significant inequities in funding allocations across regions.

The proposal for the redevelopment of the youth justice service delivery model involves integration of services and improving access at the regional level. A range of outcome-based performance measures related to the key objectives of the proposed model are being developed. The model will be implemented in metropolitan regions in October 2008, with rural implementation to commence in January 2009.

Health Services Review

A *Health Services Review* has been commissioned to address issues related to the delivery of health services to youth justice clients. The intent of the review is to:

- better understand the health needs of young offenders in youth justice units and youth justice custodial centres
- undertake an analysis of current youth justice health service with the aim of identifying both effective practices and service gaps
- identify the most appropriate health service delivery methods to achieve best outcomes for young offenders.

The project is due to be completed in September 2008.

Custodial Services Review

Despite their common custodial mandate, the three custodial centres function independently, each with their own management structures. This has created a range of operational inefficiencies, which include:

- the duplication of activities such as purchasing of goods and services
- organisational structures that impede the sharing of knowledge across centres
- limited contract management expertise
- inconsistency of program delivery
- human management practices, such as recruitment, training and staff retention.

These issues, prompted the *Custodial Services Review*, undertaken in 2007–08. A number of systems improvement initiatives are being implemented, including:

- the reallocation of resources to direct service delivery
- the creation of a shared management structure for the Parkville and Melbourne Custodial Centres
- improved budget management processes and purchasing arrangements.

Continuous improvement and service delivery improvements at a system-wide level are, in part, dependent on the results of program evaluation and reviews and information obtained through the systematic collection and analysis program data. When the Client Relationship Information System (CRIS), is fully developed it should provide DHS with evidence-based data that demonstrates service system responsiveness and the achievement of youth justice outcomes at the client, program and system levels.

Conclusion

The audit found that a number of independent reviews and program evaluations commissioned by DHS have led to significant service improvements in the delivery of youth justice services. DHS has a number of wide-ranging reviews underway into youth justice service delivery. They are focusing on service system development and improvement.

It is important that CRIS is fully developed so that data are produced to demonstrate the achievement of improvements in service system responsiveness and the achievement of youth justice outcomes at the client, program and system levels.

Recommendation

- 9.2 DHS should enhance its CRIS to systematically collect and analyse data demonstrating the extent to which system-wide initiatives are improving responsiveness in service delivery and the achievement of client, program and system outcomes.

9.1.2 The Magistrates' Court of Victoria

Continuous improvement at the client level

The Criminal Justice Diversion Program (CJDP) obtains feedback from both offenders and victims. At the completion of the diversion order, offenders and victims receive a questionnaire to obtain their views about CJDP.

Responses are reviewed by the diversion coordinators in each Magistrate's Court, however, there was no evidence that this information was used to systematically support continuous quality improvement of the diversion program. MCV should analyse feedback about CJDP and report key findings to MCV/DoJ management.

Continuous improvement at the program level

At a program level, MCV's senior diversion coordinator is responsible for monitoring key program statistics, such as the number of diversion plans successfully completed or the level of service referrals. This information is used to determine whether there is a need to implement improvement strategies, such as training for diversion coordinators and promoting greater awareness of CJDP.

Meetings of diversion coordinators are held every two months and provide a structured way for CJDP review and planning. Meetings include: discussion of program statistics; performance in relation to monthly targets; issues related to the changing and emerging needs of offenders accessing the program.

Conclusion

Feedback from offenders and victims is obtained for CJD. However, the information gained is not being used for continuous quality improvement in the delivery of the program.

Recommendation

- 9.3 MCV should analyse information received on CJD questionnaires, and report key findings.
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Appendix A.

Agency responses

Department of Human Services response

RESPONSE provided by Secretary, Department of Human Services

General comments

The Department of Human Services (the department) welcomes this report, which has reinforced the fundamental direction and operation of Victoria's youth justice system. The audit has provided a timely opportunity to take stock of our progress, and will assist in fine tuning the future direction and performance of the system.

The report acknowledges that the department has identified many of the challenges facing the system and that work is well underway to address these issues. The report has rightly identified the need for a whole of government approach to data collection and strategic planning for young offenders, along with improved performance and outcomes measurement, as areas of high priority.

In 2000, as part of the Juvenile Justice Reform Strategy, a range of diversion, rehabilitation, pre-release and post-release support programs were established. As the audit notes, while outcome and performance measures are currently underdeveloped, there is sufficient evidence to demonstrate that young people are being diverted from custody and that access to pre-release, transition and post-release support programs has increased. In addition, the department commissioned a major independent review of rehabilitation programs in 2003. This led to the development of the Victorian Offender Needs Indicator for Youth, which the audit described as "best practice" and is now adopted by several other jurisdictions in Australia.

A case management and planning framework and a range of additional rehabilitation programs have also been introduced which is indicative of the improvements forecast in the Juvenile Justice Reform strategy.

RESPONSE provided by Secretary, Department of Human Services – continued

Detailed recommendations response

Recommendation 3.1 – Service planning.

The Department of Human Services should review the Juvenile Justice Reform Strategy to determine its relevance and the extent to which its objectives and outcomes have been achieved.

This recommendation is supported in principle.

It is timely that the department reviews the relevance of the Juvenile Justice Reform Strategy in light of new challenges facing the youth justice program. Given the major improvements that have occurred since the introduction of these reforms, it is not feasible to isolate and measure the impact of specific initiatives that commenced up to eight years ago. The reform strategy was a three pronged approach including improved diversion from custody, providing better rehabilitation and expanding pre-release, transition and post-release programs.

There is clear evidence to support that the department has met the first of these objectives. Since the introduction of the diversionary measures, the average daily number of sentenced young people in custody has reduced from 169 to 121, a fall of 28%. Victoria leads Australia in diverting young people from serious criminal lifestyles, with a rate of 0.5 per 1,000 in detention which is one quarter of the national average of 2.0.

The second objective being to provide better rehabilitation has also been met. In the past eight years, the department has: introduced a structured case planning and management system; increased rehabilitation programs including violence prevention, behaviour modification and a structured modular individualised offender program; improved staff training in rehabilitating young offenders; has undertaken a major independent review into rehabilitation programs; and has introduced the Victorian Offender Needs Indicator for Youth, which is now being adopted by many other states.

The third objective of the reform strategy has also been met. As the audit notes, there is sufficient evidence to confirm that there has been increased access to pre-release, transition and post-release programs.

The department acknowledges that a comprehensive evaluation of the reform strategy which identifies rehabilitation outcomes for individual young offenders was not undertaken but, nonetheless, there is substantial evidence to support the overall success of the strategy. The continued low number of Victorian young people in custody, in spite of changes in legislation that increased the youth justice client base, proves the success of the reform strategy and the Victorian approach to rehabilitating young offenders. Lower numbers of young people in custody represents a major benefit and saving for the Victorian community. The investment in rehabilitation and diversion programs is only a small proportion of the tens of millions of dollars that would be required to build and operate detention facilities, had the reform strategy not been implemented.

RESPONSE provided by Secretary, Department of Human Services – continued

Recommendation 6.1 – Integrated case management and service delivery.

DHS should:

- *Ensure that young offenders agree and sign off against the goals and objectives identified in their client services plans*
- *Implement appropriate systems to clearly and consistently document a young offender's progress towards their case management*
- *Review the effectiveness of parole planning and post-programs to facilitate access to support services and the reintegration of young offenders returning to rural and remote areas*
- *Develop a standardised service plan for the management of young offenders on supervised bail.*

This recommendation is partially supported.

The audit identified good practice in the management of young offenders' cases and in the delivery of services. In the context of case planning the audit reports positively that; all young offenders have a Client Services Plan, all young offenders have an allocated case workers, the Client Service Plan details individual goals and provides a basis for the coordination of interventions and services, and that DHS ensures the active participation of young offenders in the development of these plans. The report noted that the additional practice, currently undertaken by Youth Justice staff, of seeking the young person's signature to the plan is considered better practice and should be further promoted across the program.

Youth Justice will develop further guidelines to promote this practice. The recommendation to ensure that all young offenders sign-off their case planning goals will be examined. It is, however, unlikely that mandating the signing of the plan would be legally enforceable and may not have a positive impact on rehabilitation outcomes for young people. Youth Justice encourages this practice in order to engage young people in the development of an individualised plan to address their behaviour. The engagement of the young person commences with their extensive involvement in the case management process. A young person's motivation or willingness to change is most impacted on by their individual circumstances, their participation in offender based programs and the relationship they form with the youth justice workers.

The department agrees with the need to enhance the systems to clearly document a young offender's progress towards their case management goals. The young person's progress is often re-assessed through; periodic updates of their risk and needs assessment (Victorian Offender Needs Indicator for Youth), reviews of their client service plan or through progress reports such as those provided to the Youth Parole Board. It is important to have effective processes in place to monitor young people's progress.

RESPONSE provided by Secretary, Department of Human Services – continued

The department also supports reviewing the effectiveness of parole planning and post release programs. In recognition of the importance of the post release support services, Youth Justice has just redeveloped the model of post release support programs. This important reform, which will be implemented in 2008-09, will enable community sector organisations to form consortia or partnerships with agencies in each DHS region and become better integrated with other youth service providers to ensure more seamless access to services.

The recommendation to develop a specific plan for bail clients is also supported. In recognition of the need for a standardised approach, Youth Justice has begun improvement initiatives that include:

- *The development of a standard format for a documented bail plan for young people at risk of breaching bail or re-offending. This will be tailored to the support required for young people at this stage of their involvement with the criminal justice system. (Once completed this will be considered for incorporation into CRIS as a standard document.)*
- *Reviewing current bail assessment tools to develop a standard assessment for state wide application that is fit for this purpose.*
- *Targeted training for Adult Court Advice Staff (ACAS) in May 2008 focused on documentation and case file recording. Youth Justice has an established system of case file auditing by team leaders, and this will be reviewed to include ACAS staff more explicitly.*

Recommendation 7.1 – Information systems.

DHS should enhance the management reporting capability of the Client Relationship Information System to identify:

- *Trends in the needs of young offenders*
- *The effectiveness of interventions and services in meeting the assessed needs of young offenders and modifying their behaviour*
- *The extent to which interventions and services contribute to the rehabilitation of young offenders and reduced recidivism.*

This recommendation is supported.

The Youth Justice functionality provided by the CRIS system is much richer than the system it replaced. In recognition of the critical role the non-government agencies play in client service delivery, the electronic system has a component that allows use by agencies involved in case management services on the department's behalf to facilitate the sharing of common case management information. Implementation of this system has already occurred for a number of agencies. Planning is currently underway to prioritise further roll-out of this functionality. The community service organisations that provide youth justice related services are included in this planning process.

RESPONSE provided by Secretary, Department of Human Services – continued

Recommendation 7.2 – Information systems.

DHS in conjunction with other State Government Departments and agencies involved in the delivery of youth justice services should develop a whole-of-government approach to data collection and analysis to support shared planning and service development. This should be complemented by arrangements to support effective information sharing within and across agencies.

This recommendation is supported in principle.

The Department recognises the value of data sharing and collection across other State Government departments and agencies. Youth Justice has included an identifier within the CRIS system to enable this to occur. The feasibility of this recommendation is yet to be assessed across government including consideration of legislative requirements and the compatibility of data collection systems.

Recommendations 8.1 and 8.2 – Cost Efficiency and Effectiveness.

DHS, the Department of Justice and the Magistrate’s Court of Victoria should:

- *Expedite the development of benchmark data to measure operational efficiency*
- *Incorporate output data into operational management reports that track output cost rates*
- *Review output and unit cost data to form a baseline against which current performance can be assessed. (Rec. 8.1)*

DHS should:

- *Ensure that outcomes measures being developed by the Australian Institute of Criminology adequately assess the effectiveness of youth justice programs and services in reducing reoffending and improving rehabilitation*
- *Assess the feasibility of using the Victorian Offender Needs Indicator for Youth to enable the effectiveness of youth justice programs, services and interventions aimed at rehabilitating young offenders to be measured. (Rec 8.2)*

The recommendations to improve performance and outcomes measures are supported and the department has strategies in place to implement this recommendation. In recognition of the need for improvements to performance measurement youth justice has undertaken considerable work to improve information systems, reporting and performance measures through a range of activities, including;

- *The development, implementation and continuous refinement of the Client Relationship Information System (CRIS) from 2004-2008*
- *Redevelopment of the design of the data reports available from CRIS*
- *Commissioned the Australian Institute of Criminology to explore the use of recidivism as the primary measurement of effectiveness and develop other potential outcome measure for young offenders*

RESPONSE provided by Secretary, Department of Human Services – continued

- Led a project for the Australasian Juvenile Justice Administrators to develop an agreed set of key performance indicators for national reporting. It is anticipated that these will include measures relating to equity, efficiency and effectiveness domains

Youth Justice has commissioned the Australian Institute of Criminology to assist in the development work required for this recommendation. The project will review the appropriateness of using “recidivism” as the primary measure of the effectiveness of the youth justice program and assist in the identification of a suite of other outcome measures that are suitable for young offenders taking into consideration their maturation level and the well researched finding that adolescence is the peak period for re-offending.

The department supports in principle assessing the feasibility of using the Victorian Offender Needs Indicator for Youth to enable the effectiveness and measurement of youth justice programs, services and interventions aimed at rehabilitating young offenders. Whilst this tool was developed for the assessments of individuals it is possible that a modified version could be applied for this purpose.

Recommendation 9.1 – Service improvement.

DHS should implement a structured client feedback mechanism for youth justice units and ACAS that provides young offenders with the opportunity to provide input into the delivery of community based services and supervision.

This recommendation is supported.

Youth Justice will establish formal mechanisms for collecting client feedback. It is pleasing to see the positive findings in the report related to the mechanism adopted in the youth justice custodial centres to seek input from young people. The recently established Aboriginal Community Visitors program will also provide an independent feedback mechanism for Aboriginal custodial clients. Regional youth justice units currently incorporate client feedback at a local level but not in a systematic way. A formal and system wide process for client feedback will be established and piloted in 2008/09.

Department of Justice response

RESPONSE provided by Acting Secretary, Department of Justice

While the Department of Justice supports in principle the recommendations it is noted that some of the recommendations will need to be carefully considered before the Department can commit to implementing them. Recommendations 8.3 and 8.4 may involve a considerable and currently unknown cost to the Department and recommendation 9.3 would require the Department of Justice to collaborate with Victoria Police. The implications of these issues will need to be considered before the Department can commit to implementing these recommendations.

Also, it should be noted that there are a number of activities currently underway or planned within the Corrections and Courts portfolios that address the some of the issues highlighted in the recommendations, including:

Corrections Portfolio

- Corrections Victoria (CV) is a member of the Youth Justice Outcomes Research Project Reference Group established to provide expert knowledge, information, advice and feedback to the Australian Institute of Criminology at key stages of the project. The Outcomes Research Project commissioned by the DHS Youth Services and Youth Justice (YS&YJ), will review conventional outcome measures for Youth Justice and propose additional and alternative measures that may enhance the understanding of the impact of the youth justice service.
- The YS&YJ and CV have worked together to develop the draft Framework for the Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Young Adult Offenders. This is a four year strategy to improve outcomes for young offenders managed by the Youth Justice Service and CV.
- The draft Framework supports a coordinated approach to data collection and analysis to enable the design and delivery of programs and activities for young offenders, in an improved way.
- The draft Framework has received in principle support within CV and Youth Justice and will be forwarded to the Ministers for endorsement following finalisation of the implementation plan and communication strategy.

RESPONSE provided by Acting Secretary, Department of Justice – continued

Courts Portfolio

- The criteria for the Criminal Justice Diversion Plan (CJDP), its governing legislation and the process for initiating referrals are part of the Victoria Police Manual. The Magistrates' Court of Victoria (MCV) also conducts information sessions for all Victoria Police recruits, gives presentations to local police stations and has representation on the Victoria Police Caution and Diversion Working Party.
- The MCV currently compiles a range of data to measure the CJDP against the agreed targets. The MCV is happy to be involved in the development of benchmark data to measure the operation of the programs."

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