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AN EVALUATION OF THE DIVERSION PROGRAMME FOR YOUNG OFFENDERS AGED 12 – 17 YEARS OLD IN THE WESTERN CAPE (Phase 1 and Phase 2)

SUMMARY REPORT

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1. Introduction

In 2015, the Social Crime Prevention Programme (SCPP) requested the Department's Research Unit to undertake an evaluation of the Diversion Programmes for child offenders. The request for the evaluation was based on the following concerns of the Programme. Firstly, that there appeared to be a reduction in the number of child offenders referred to the Diversion Programme and secondly, that many child offenders were not completing the Diversion Programmes they were ordered to attend. Finally, the Programme's overarching need was to explore whether Diversion Programmes offered to child offenders contributed to a reduction in the risk of recidivism.

Since the completion of the report, the Diversion Programme has compiled both a Management Response and Improvement Plan¹ aimed at addressing both the recommendations and actions to be taken in order to strengthen areas of concern highlighted through the evaluation.

2. Evaluation Design and Methods

The evaluation was divided into two phases:

The main aim of Phase One was to undertake a process evaluation of the implementation of the diversion programme for child offenders. The following evaluation questions informed this phase of the evaluation:

- Are children being effectively diverted through the assessment process?
- Are the diversion options to child offenders available and accessible?
- Are child offenders placed in the appropriate diversion programmes?
- What are the reasons for non-completion/drop out from diversion programmes?
- Are there any consequences for non-completion/ non-compliance?
- Are children provided with after care services in the twelve-month post diversion?
- Are diversion programmes adequately resourced?
- What challenges are experienced in the implementation of the diversion programme?
- What local best practices, at programme theory and implementation level, are emerging in the field of diversion?

¹ According to the Evaluation Guidelines of the national Department of Monitoring and Evaluation, both a Management Response and Improvement Plan must be compiled in response to an evaluation report.

In this phase, a mixed-methods approach was used that included both quantitative and qualitative data. These methods included: content analysis of documents and materials, individual semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with professionals.

Phase Two explored the extent and possible factors that contributed to children reoffending, post-diversion. The following evaluation questions guided this phase of the evaluation:

- What are the child offenders' views on factors that encourage and discourage recidivism?
- Which family/ household dynamics impact on child reoffending?
- Does peer relations impact on child reoffending?
- Which community factors encourage recidivism?
- What after care services are provided?
- How do aftercare services (or the lack thereof) affect child reoffending?
- How do aftercare services (or the lack thereof) affect the family?
- Which contributing factors possibly support desistance?

In both phases, a purposive sampling method was used to identify DSD Regions and Service Delivery Areas. The main sampling criteria was that sites should represent areas with high and low rates of referrals to diversion. In view of this, the following sites were selected:

- Metro East (Khayelitsha), West Coast (Saldanha, Vredenburg) and Winelands (Bredasdorp) for their low diversion rates.
- Metro South (Mitchell's Plain) and Winelands Overberg (Worcester) for their high rates of diversion.

The evaluation methods used consisted mainly of the collection of qualitative data in the form of semi-structured, individual interviews and focus group discussions. Due to challenges with the quality and accessibility of administrative data required to undertake a quantitative analysis of the extent of recidivism, a key aim of phase two could not be explored.

2. Policy Background informing the Evaluation

South Africa experienced a transition in its child justice reform efforts when the Child Justice Act 75 of 2008 (CJA) was implemented in April 2010. One of the CJA's central aims is to encourage the diversion of young offenders away from formal court procedures, thereby allowing children an opportunity to voice their views on the circumstances of their offending behaviour. The CJA defines

diversion as follows: the diversion of a matter involving a child away from the formal court procedures in a criminal matter by means of the procedures established by Chapter 6 and 8 in the Act.

The overall objectives of diversion as stated in the Act, Chapter 8 (Section 51) is to: deal with a child outside the formal criminal justice system in appropriate cases; encourage the child to be accountable for the harm caused by him or her; meet the particular needs of the individual child; promote the reintegration to those affected by the harm to express their views on its impact on them; encourage the rendering to the victim of some symbolic benefit or the delivery of some object as compensation for the harm; promote reconciliation between the child and the person or community affected by the harm caused by the child; prevent the stigmatisation of the child and prevent adverse consequence from being subject to the criminal justice system; reduce potential reoffending; prevent the child from having a criminal record and finally, promote the dignity and well-being of the child, and the development of his or her sense of self-worth and ability to contribute to society.

3. Key Evaluation Findings

3.1 Phase One Findings

Are children being effectively diverted through the assessment process?

Professional participants shared that the process from assessment to placement of a child offender was fairly effective. However, the following challenges that influences the effectiveness of the assessment process were identified:

Firstly, the level of anxiety a child may experience and the time needed to establish rapport with a probation officer, affected the initial assessment. Secondly, factors such as unclear court instructions and limited case details received from probation officers and magistrates; a lack of information relating to the child's previous offences, and some probation officer's lack of specialized skills during the assessment process, affected the quality and completeness of assessments. A further concern is that certain assessments led to avoidable diversion placements of children. Finally, the needs of some child offenders exceeded what a single diversion programme could address.

Are the diversion options to child offenders available and accessible?

The availability and accessibility of diversion options for child offenders were dependent on several factors. Travel and distance played a vital role in the accessibility of the diversion options. Non-Metro

areas were particularly challenged by the vastness of the geographical spaces. Facilitators responded to this challenge by transporting children to and from the programmes. Safety was frequently mentioned as a factor that impacted on the accessibility of the diversion options, especially within the Metro regions. The physical location of probation officers, courts and diversion programmes further affected the accessibility of the diversion programmes. Similarly, the placement of child offenders in appropriate diversion programmes were contingent on the diversion programmes being presented in the areas where they reside.

The availability of diversion programmes varied from one area to another. Different Regions/ SDA's reported to present different diversion programmes. The availability of (trained) facilitators, nature of offences committed, number of child offenders referred to the diversion programme, influenced the type and frequency of a diversion programme/s being presented in individual Regions. A waiting period between when a child had been referred to a diversion programme and the actual participation in the programme existed, during which the child is usually at home, with no intervention.

Are child offenders placed in the appropriate diversion programmes?

Whether children are placed in appropriate diversion programmes depends on the availability of suitable diversion programmes and facilitators in the Regions. The evaluation highlighted that “generic” programmes, particularly the life skills programmes, have been over-utilized for several reasons.

What are the reasons for non-completion/drop out from diversion programmes?

The evaluation revealed that non-compliance with and non-completion of the diversion programmes was a frequent occurrence. This was related to factors such as the psycho-social challenges of the children, specifically, the discomfort some children experienced in to function within group sessions, low levels of literacy and substance abuse. The harsh response of facilitators to children's absence from the programme and a lack of understanding of the consequences of non-completion of diversion by both children and their caregivers as well as presiding officers who fail to provide children with a specified court return date after the completion of a diversion programme, contributed to this phenomenon. In some areas, a lack of safety to and from venues emerged as a challenge for children and the relocation of children and families.

Are there any consequences for non-completion/ non-compliance?

Officials employed a diverse range of responses to cases of non-completion and compliance. On the one hand, officials were more lenient and suggested that extensive efforts, for the child's return

to the diversion programme, needed to be employed before non-completion or compliance can be concluded; whereas, on the other hand, officials shared that legal sanctions are needed.

Are children provided with after-care services in the twelve-months post diversion?

Aftercare services for the child offenders are almost non-existent. Challenges such as the workload of probation officers were mentioned as one of the reasons for the lack of aftercare services. Despite the lack of aftercare services, the probation officers agreed that aftercare service for the children and caregivers could be the most crucial part of the diversion process. Aftercare services lacks family focused interventions and support.

Are diversion programmes adequately resourced?

The majority of Metro and non-metro areas appeared to be understaffed and did not have adequate numbers of probation officers and assistant probation officers. Probation officers reported that the support of assistant probation officers and social work interns significantly influenced the quality of services provided.

Training of probation officers emerged as a major challenge and almost non-existent. Specialized training in the field of probation was requested. Specific training on how to deal with aggressive, violent child offenders was repeatedly asked for because there is an increase in these cases, according to the probation officers. Facilitators were reported to only be trained in specific accredited programmes. The Master Trainer approach seemed to be ineffective for various reasons.

Venues for the facilitation of diversion programmes is needed. Security of venues was identified as a challenge as these were placed in 'risky areas. The time schedules for the diversion programmes highlighted created further challenges, as some participants were not available at the time when the intervention was offered. Certain Regions created external partnerships to strengthen the diversion programmes and related initiatives in their areas of operation. Tool kits and programme manuals were absent in certain SDAs. Facilitators frequently mentioned the need to utilize their personal items during the programme.

What challenges are experienced in the implementation of the diversion programme?

Changes to the existing accredited programmes are commonly made in the field. These changes were a consequence of limited time, work load, the availability of facilitators and what the facilitators understood to be working in the field. These challenges in the field included the overuse of "generic" programmes, the probation officers' lack of specialized skills, programmes that were too basic for

the needs of the children and the absence of specialized diversion programmes. More detailed information is provided per diversion programme in the full report.

3.1 Phase Two Findings

What are the child offenders' views on individual factors that encourage child reoffending, post-diversion?

The findings of the evaluation revealed several individual traits that are understood to have a significant impact on child reoffending. The individual traits mentioned included the children's inability to control their anger in challenging situations and how to resolve conflict; underestimating the seriousness of the crime and their criminal behaviour; low self-esteem and a discouraged attitude when others try to mentor them; prior intervention of the child and early onset of criminal behaviour and also the challenge of maintaining individual change, post-diversion.

Which family/ household dynamics impact on child reoffending?

The findings of the evaluation revealed the fragility of families within the various research sites. The fragile state of the families in which the children are raised and continue to navigate appears to play a crucial role in increasing the risk of children reoffending. The economic deprivation and poverty of families, alongside the children's exposure to family trauma and violence increases the child's risk of reoffending, post-diversion.

Do peer relations impact on child reoffending?

Peer relations appears to influence the risk of children reoffending, post diversion. The findings of this evaluation highlighted that who the children associate themselves with, in the areas where they stay or at school, can place the child at a higher or lower risk of reoffending. Similarly, children's relationships with older individuals, alongside the dropping out of school and the "school-to-prison pipeline" placed the child at risk of reoffending.

Which community factors encourage recidivism?

Several social risk factors related to the areas in which children reside have been highlighted as possible contributing factors to children reoffending, post diversion. These include children's constant exposure to physical and emotional violence in the areas where they reside. The normalisation of violence at various levels, had a negative influence on children's socialisation and contributed to children using violence as a mechanism to protect themselves or significant others. Furthermore, many children were constantly exposed to various forms of emotional maltreatment, such as verbal

abuse, provocation and stigmatisation. These risk factors were aggravated by the availability of substances in high risk areas, gangsterism and a lack of recreational services.

Which after care services are provided?

The majority of the children and their caregivers stated that no aftercare services were provided. Aftercare support was only provided in specific Regions.

How do aftercare services (or the lack thereof) affect child reoffending?

The findings of the evaluation suggest that aftercare support can play a vital role in child reoffending. It appears that, in the Regions where aftercare support is provided, children are better able to maintain the behavioural change and implement the skills and knowledge acquired through the diversion programmes. The quality of the aftercare services and particularly that of the APO or probation officer is of utmost importance.

How do aftercare services (or the lack thereof) affect the family?

The overall support provided to the family, during and post diversion, are limited. This is especially the case when considering the aftercare support for family members. Aftercare support for the families are non-existent in certain Regions. As a result, the child has been taught new skills but has to continue to function in an unchanging, familial situation.

Which contributing factors possibly support desistance?

The overall state of the family appears to play a significant role in decreasing the risk of children reoffending, post-diversion. The family structure, alongside, the physical, social and economic stability of the family influenced the child's risk to reoffend. Engaged caregivers and engaging family relationships supported the child, post-diversion, resulting in the child not reoffending. The children, who felt supported and accepted, by their caregivers and others, were at a lower risk of reoffending.

The report clearly displayed the children's challenges within the areas in which they resided. Participants did not state any factors within their communities that reduced reoffending. However, specific strategies to reduce the risk of children reoffending included: moving out of the areas for a short period of time, spending limited time outside of the home and getting involved in extra mural activities.

Peer and school factors that assisted in reducing the risk on child reoffending included efforts such as peer support amongst youth. Changing their peer associations and development intimate relationships seemed to redirect the children's trajectory away from crime. Similarly, the presence

and engagement of young role models in the areas played a significant role in deterring child reoffending. In addition, children refocus on schooling was also reported to dissuade children from criminal activity; alongside, relationships with supportive teachers and peers.

Several individual characteristics were reported to discourage reoffending, post-diversion. First time and repeat offenders, reported the following factors which they believed deterred recidivism. These factors include: the self-esteem and confidence of a child, the child's ability to control their anger, expressing remorse, feelings of being less excluded, possessing the willingness to change their behaviour and improving communication skills.

Finally, Phase 1 and 2 revealed that after-care was and continues to be limited or non-existent in SDAs. However, quality after-care support seems to have an impact on reducing the risk of children reoffending, post-diversion. Quality after-care services included appropriately trained professionals, frequent face-to-face interaction and a non-judgemental, socially inclusive and positive (encouraging) approach to the child offenders and their caregivers. The approach of the professional play a major role during this process. Young people responded positively to non-judgemental, supportive, empathetic and engaged officials. The frequency of contact and support was also shown to be significant in reducing the child's risk to reoffend.

3. Conclusion

In view of the key findings of the evaluation, *the* following concluding remarks can be made:

3.1 Phase One

The overall effectiveness of diversion programmes for child offenders cannot be assessed within an oversimplified, understanding of diversion as a single entity. Instead, the efficacy of the diversion programmes are dependent on several direct and indirect factors. Therefore, the effectiveness of a diversion programme is contingent on a multitude of factors that can include the available person power to implement the programmes, efficient processes from assessments of child offenders to the placement in a diversion programme and the quality of facilitators and their training. Similarly, the socio-cultural backgrounds of the children and their family and the aftercare services impacts on the execution and value of the programmes. Overall, the regions highlighted similar challenges experienced with the implementation of the diversion programmes for child offenders. The distinctions between the various Regions were merely in the varying degrees of these factors.

In this project, the importance of understanding diversion as a process was highlighted. It was clear from the data that different individuals undertook specific duties from the time of assessment of a child offender to post-diversion. One of the findings from the data is related to the importance of efficiency from the assessment of the child to post-diversion stage. In other words, if at the start of this diversion process the assessment of a child is effectively administered, this inefficiency impacts on the rest of the diversion process; thereby impacting on the effectiveness of the diversion. It is therefore of utmost importance that from the onset (assessment), professionals are effective at each stage of the process. Synergy between the professionals at different stages, from assessment to post-diversion, is therefore crucial.

Another significant finding that emerged relates to the framework in which the Diversion Programmes are being developed and implemented. Despite the participants' understanding that a holistic/ ecological approach is encouraged in the child's development, such a multi-levelled approach is not translated within the actual implementation of the programme and its programmatic design. Rather, diversion appears to be responded to as an isolated point at which a child receives psycho-social intervention, in an attempt to divert the child from the criminal justice system. In other words, the emphasis is almost solely placed on the child offender whereas engagement and support for the family and community is minimal, even non-existent. The exclusion of family and community support is clearly evident in a number of the accredited diversion programme manuals for example. Participants have indicated that there is a need for extended support that includes family and community interventions. It is therefore assumed that the inclusion of official extended support to family and communities will have a positive impact on the effectiveness of the diversion programmes. Diversion should therefore not be responded to as a category that is separate from external factors impacting the programmes and the post-diversion life of the child offender. Rather, a concerted effort should be placed on supporting the family, community and post-diversion life of the child and those affected in an attempt to increase the effectiveness of diversion in future developments.

The specialization of professionals and diversion programmes is also needed. For example, accredited programmes that specifically targets aggressive/ violent child offenders has been requested but at the same time, probation officers have requested to be trained to deal with such child offenders. Linked to the specialization of programmes is the need to develop more nuanced diversion programmes. In other words, there is a need for diversion programmes to be developed based on the different levels at which a child offender finds him or herself. A simple example can be seen with the substance abuse programme. Different substance abuse programmes can be presented to the child offenders at different stages of their involvement with substance related

disorders. A distinction can therefore be made between the development and implementation of diversion programmes that focuses on, for example, a child who “experiments”, a child who uses more frequently and a child who needs a more intense intervention. This type of gradation can be employed on various levels and programmes for diversion. Closely linked to the specialization and gradation of diversion programmes is the concurrent use of multiple programmes. A multiple intervention approach will allow for several needs and risks to be addressed and thereby not merely focusing on a single factor, as it is clear that the child offenders, their families and the communities in which they reside are confronted with numerous socio-economic challenges.

Revisiting Section 3.2 of this report that discusses the international evidence on ‘what works’ in managing young people who offend, the findings of this project is in agreement on various issues that have been highlighted to increase the effectiveness of diversion. The findings of this project supports the international literature in the following ways: interventions be tailored to the approaches of the children’s learning styles and abilities for instance; therapeutic programmes tend to be more effective than the programmes that are focused on punitive and control approaches; the use of multiple services that addresses several needs of the child; the quality of the service provided is crucial and finally, including the wider offending context in the programme.

To conclude, the existing accredited diversion programmes can be beneficial for specific child offenders, particularly first time offenders and those who had committed less serious crimes. Specialised, therapeutic diversion programmes and appropriately trained professionals for such programmes are however needed for the child offender who committed serious violent crimes. Finally, the diversion programmes are unable to solely transform the behaviour of the child offender and sustain any socially acceptable behaviour without placing extended efforts on improving the socio-economic conditions of the child, family and community.

3.2 Phase Two

Based on the findings of this evaluation, it is suggested that to increase the effectiveness of the existing diversion programmes on child reoffending, a far more holistic approach is needed during and post-diversion. This evaluation acknowledges that, theoretically, the existing diversion programmes does suggest an ecological approach in its design that is inclusive of the child, family and community. However, the actual implementation of this holistic approach is evidently challenged. Currently, the child is the focal point, whereas, minimal attention, services and support is provided to the family and context in which the children have to navigate.

Therefore, to improve the overall effectiveness of the diversion programmes, the programme design of the various programmes should be restructured in such a way that extensive services are provided to the family members and community, simultaneously; as opposed to the limited, intermittent services that are currently employed. At the same time, it is however important to mention that this particular gap in practice and theory has been identified in specific regions. Consequently, professionals in these regions have attempted bridge this gap through developing specific course material for the caregivers and better supporting family members. Still, such efforts to better include support for family members are site-dependent and not extensively included in the accredited diversion programmes.

Equivalently, focus and efforts should be placed on improving the social fabric of the areas in which the child offenders and their parents reside. It is however clear that attempts to improve the overall areas in which the children and families reside presents various challenges. These challenges include the complexity and time-consuming nature of such development. At the same time, community development far exceeds the mandate of the diversion programme. Therefore, to increase the effectiveness of the diversion programmes and the sustainability of behavioural change within the young children, it is pertinent that quality, frequent, after-care services be provided to the child and family. But this report has also highlighted the challenges with aftercare and how the lack of resources, for instance, have impacted on poor or non-existent aftercare support. In response to these challenges, this report fully supports that extensive effort be placed into exploring alternative, creative ways of providing support to the child and family, post diversion.

Efforts geared towards improving the functioning of the family might also result in the child being better equipped to deal with the constant, multi-levelled challenges that youth are exposed to. Consequently, the effectiveness of the diversion programme might increase if such external factors can be addressed alongside the actual diversion programmes. Currently, the diversion programmes mainly focus on the child. Still, the remaining stressors and challenging social climate persists; thereby increasing the likelihood of the child reoffending. The social environment and triggers that existed prior remains post-diversion and constantly challenges the child to implement the skills and sustain any change that might have taken place that have been imparted during the programme.

In terms of the programme design, the evaluation has also revealed the poly-victimisation that the child (re)offenders have been exposed to. The children's narratives have explicitly disclosed the extent of violent victimisation experienced by young children within the different research sites. The experiences of violent victimisation has been extensively revealed in the experiences of young male children. It can therefore be proposed that blurred lines exist between the young male child being

an offender/ perpetrator and victim of crime and violence. This evaluation would therefore encourage that the ideological framework from which the diversion programmes have been designed from off supports the “Child First, Offender Second” ideological standpoint. This is particularly relevant with regards to the male, child offenders; as this evaluation reiterates other scholarly research that suggests a link between child victimisation and child offending; also, the hyper-criminalisation of young males who reside in areas such as the research sites. In addition, it might be beneficial to include the concept of child trauma whilst working with the child offenders, during and post-diversion as the evaluation has clearly highlighted the constant, multi-levelled victimisation of the child offenders.

Finally, the effectiveness of the diversion programmes relating to child reoffending is varied. It might be most useful to understand the impact of the diversion programmes on child reoffending as a continuum. In other words, the skills imparted during the diversion programme and the implementation thereof post-diversion, in deterring child reoffending, is not always visible. Rather, the shift in the child's behaviour and cognition have been reported to be noticeable changes but at the same time, the children's completion of a diversion programme has also brought about miniscule changes that are not always visible and measurable. Simultaneously, the effectiveness of the diversion programmes might also be better understood as a process; any transformation in the child's behaviour might not be immediate but need to be internalised and practiced over time; hence the evaluation supports ongoing, quality aftercare support for the child and family.

4. Recommendations

The following recommendations are made in respect of the findings of Phase One of the Evaluation:

4.1 Recommendations for the Western Cape Department of Social Development

Assessments, referrals and placements

- Training opportunities on developmental assessments should be presented to probation officers; in an attempt to improve the overall quality of the assessment forms.
- Social work supervisors and managers should continuously review the assessment forms completed by probation officers in order to monitor and improve the quality of probation practice.
- Probation officers should be encouraged to place child offenders in multiple diversion programmes when the child is challenged by multiple risks (as explained in Section 7.6.4.). For example, a child who has committed a criminal offence but also struggles with a substance dependency should be placed within programmes that focus on both these risks.

Availability, accessibility and appropriateness of Diversion Programme

- Probation officers should be encouraged to increase the use of diversion options such as reporting orders and family time orders, while the child is waiting to be placed in a programme.
- One-on-one and smaller group interventions should be facilitated when child offenders are waiting to be placed in a programme.
- Probation officers, assistant probation officers and presiding officers should be educated and kept informed of current, available diversion programmes in the relevant Regions.
- The availability and accessibility of psycho-social support services for children should be improved.
- Intervention programmes and support services should be developed for the caregivers of child offenders.
- Time slots for the facilitation of the programmes should be reconsidered.

Non-completion/drop out from Diversion Programmes

- Options should be considered for children who are unable to attend some of the sessions, for example one-on-one sessions could be provided.
- Children and family members should be educated on the processes and consequences of diversion.
- A 'roadmap' of the process could act as a useful means of education.
- Transport should be provided and co-ordinated by DSD for children who have challenges reaching the venue where diversion sessions are provided, in order to improve attendance.

After care services

Assistant probation officers should be placed in all regions. This will allow for the APOS to commit themselves to providing continuous support to the child and families post-diversion.

Resources

In terms of human resources, the following is proposed:

- Supervision for probation officers and assistant probation officers must be improved.
- Probation officers should ideally be managed by professionals with extensive experience in the field of probation.
- Existing training for probation officers is inadequate. Probation officers are in need of more comprehensive and specialised training. It is recommended that designated trainer/s are appointed/made available to train probation officers.
- Constant 'refresher' courses should be presented to newer and seasoned probation officers and assistant probation officers.
- Master training as an approach should be revisited and evaluated. It might be far more useful and effective to appoint a trainer/s to present training for probation officers.

In terms of logistical resources, the following is proposed:

- Fixed venues should be made available for the facilitation of programmes.
- Every region should be provided with the necessary tool kits to facilitate the diversion programme. Enterprise Content Management (ECM) can be utilised to make all the relevant diversion manuals and relevant documents available to DSD staff.

Recommendations for external stakeholders

Department of Justice

- Presiding officers should be informed and encouraged to provide probation officers, the child and caregivers with 'return dates'.
- A long term recommendation: amend the current policy in making return dates obligatory for presiding officers.
- A designated space should be created at courts where assessments with children and caregivers can be conducted.

South African Police

- SAPS officials should be informed and encouraged to refer all children who have been arrested to relevant probation officers.
- A long term recommendation: an amendment to the policy can make it obligatory for SAPS officials to refer all children who have been arrested; to allow for the child to be assessed by a probation officer/ social worker.

The following recommendations are made in respect of the findings of Phase Two of the Evaluation:

Programmatic Recommendations

- A specialised, therapeutic anger management programme is needed. This is particularly relevant for child offenders who have been apprehended for violent crimes such as assault. If the development of such a specialised programme is not possible, extensive focus on anger and anger management skills should be provided in the current diversion programmes.
- More attention should be given to conflict resolution skills within the more general, life skills programmes. Children and their caregivers should be equipped to identify individual factors that provoke violent behaviour and how to better respond to this.
- Currently, the inclusion of family members/ caregivers within the diversion programmes are limited. Additional sessions for family participation is needed in the diversion programmes. It will be useful to include specific, parental training that focuses on how to parent within violent, stressful contexts in the additional sessions.

- Children and caregivers should constantly be informed about the seriousness of the diversion programme and the consequences thereof.
- Trauma counselling should be made accessible to child offenders. Greater emphasis should be placed on the children's exposure and experiences to violence.
- Gender-specific approaches need to be considered in the design and implementation of diversion programmes. The current evaluation has suggested that young girls and boys experience and respond differently to social contexts and situations; consequently, girls are in need of different skills and education.
- The "safe spaces and safe people" teaching/ motto that is taught and encouraged in programmes such as Alcoholic Anonymous should be incorporated into the lessons of all diversion programmes as the evaluation has indicated that children's risky associations, in general, increases the child's likelihood to reoffend.
- The diversion programmes should include a peer support programme for the youth. An example of such a programme can include peer mentoring such as a "buddy" or mentor who can support the child while in diversion programmes as to reduce reoffending.
- The current diversion programmes should be expanded and include the education and skills development of caregivers, during and post-diversion.
- Professionals dealing with child offenders should continually be reminded of the "Child First, Offender Second" approach.
- Improve collaborations with other internal DSD programmes such as Children and Families, who can assist with family preservation and compiling parenting plans.
- Relationships and collaborations between probation officers and other stakeholders, especially SAPS and educators, should be improved.

Preventative Measures for Child Recidivism

- Extensive focus should be placed on at-risk, pre-adolescent children. Education and skills development on varying topics, including conflict resolution and life skills, should be geared towards this particular age group as the evaluation has indicated that pre-adolescent children are vulnerable and at high risk of getting involved in criminal activity or are already engaging in criminal activity.
- A greater role should be found for community development and community workers in assisting children and caregivers, pre and post diversion. Community development workers should be utilised to link children and their caregivers to existing social services and organisations within the SDAs. 'Problematic' public spaces ('hangout spots') of young people should be identified. Once these public spaces have been identified, it can be used

as entry points to at-risk youth; who can be encouraged to participate in available programmes or access appropriate social services. Community development workers can assist in this regard.

- Probation officers and assistant probation officers should be encouraged and trained to employ an approach that does not allow for the children and their families to feel excluded and judged, during and post-diversion. Based on the findings of the evaluation, children, who were engaging with facilitators who adopted an inclusive and non-judgemental approach, seemed to embrace the diversion programme and be far more likely to want to change and make an effort to change.

After-care recommendations

- Probation officers and assistant probation officers should assist the children and caregivers in creating peer support groups. Separate support groups could be created for the child and caregivers.
- Probation officers and assistant probation officers are not always able to provide face-to-face consultations with the child. Therefore, alternative ways of communication can be employed. Apart from face-to-face consultations, increased telephonic communication or the use of social media applications (where possible) – should be implemented. Telephonic and/ online counselling can be provided to the child and caregivers.
- Children and caregivers should be linked to the basic, social work support services in the areas in which they reside.
- Probation officers and assistant probation officers should provide young children and caregivers with information of existing social groups in the specific SDAs in which they reside. These social groups can include faith-based organisations.
- Collaborations with other DSD programmes, such as Isibindi, needs to be strengthened. The children and caregivers need to be linked to such programmes post-diversion.
- Children, who had completed the diversion programmes, should be trained and utilised to provide support for their peers.
- Children, who are not attending school, need assistance to re-enter the school system. Community workers can be utilised in linking the child to the schools.
- Probation officers, assistant probation officers and social workers should be trained and constantly reminded to employ a socially-inclusive, non-judgemental approach in their engagements with the children and their caregivers. After care to be followed as per guidance of the Reintegration and After Care Strategy for Probation Officers (2015) as well as the minimum norms and standard, Norm 19 of Diversion (2015).

External DSD

- Mental health professionals, namely psychologists and psychiatrists, should be made available for the children and families when needed.
- After-school and school holiday programmes should be made available for children and their families. The Social Crime Programme can link with the After School Game Changers.
- Similarly, the Social Crime Programme can collaborate with the Alcohol Reduction Game Changer.

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