

Measuring the Impact of Implementing an Effective Practice Skills Training Model in Youth Detention

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Abstract : Aims: This study aims to examine the effectiveness of a practice skills framework implemented in three youth detention centres in Juvenile Justice in New South Wales (NSW), Australia. The study is supported by a grant from and Australian Research Council and NSW Juvenile Justice. Recent years have seen a number of incidents in youth detention centres in Australia and other places. These have led to inquiries and reviews with some suggesting that detention centres often do not even meet basic human rights and do little in terms of providing opportunities for rehabilitation of residents. While there is an increasing body of research suggesting that community based supervision can be effective in reducing recidivism if appropriate skills are used by supervisors, there has been less work considering worker skills in youth detention settings. The research that has been done, however, suggest that teaching interpersonal skills to youth officers may be effective in enhancing the rehabilitation culture of centres. Positive outcomes have been seen in a UK detention centre for example, from teaching staff to do five-minute problem-solving interventions. The aim of this project is to examine the effectiveness of training and coaching youth detention staff in three NSW detention centres in interpersonal practice skills. Effectiveness is defined in terms of reductions in the frequency of critical incidents and improvements in the well-being of staff and young people. The research is important as the results may lead to the development of more humane and rehabilitative experiences for young people. Method: The study involves training staff in core effective practice skills and supporting staff in the use of those skills through supervision and de-briefing. The core effective practice skills include role clarification, pro-social modelling, brief problem solving, and relationship skills. The training also addresses some of the background to criminal behaviour including trauma. Data regarding critical incidents and well-being before and after the program implementation are being collected. This involves interviews with staff and young people, the completion of well-being scales, and examination of departmental records regarding critical incidents. In addition to the before and after comparison a matched control group which is not offered the intervention is also being used. The study includes more than 400 young people and 100 youth officers across 6 centres including the control sites. Data collection includes interviews with workers and young people, critical incident data such as assaults, use of lock ups and confinement and school attendance. Data collection also includes analysing video-tapes of centre activities for changes in the use of staff skills. Results: The project is currently underway with ongoing training and supervision. Early results will be available for the conference.

Keywords : custody, practice skills, training, youth workers

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