



An Australian Government Initiative



## NATIONAL COMMUNITY CRIME PREVENTION PROGRAMME

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# Adventure-based programmes: can they contribute to crime prevention outcomes for young people?

Adventure-based programmes include those programmes that involve taking a group of young people away from their usual environment or engaging them in adventure-type physical activity. Such programmes are often accompanied by a therapeutic or skills development element, and are usually targeted at young people who have had contact with the criminal justice system or are 'at risk' of becoming involved in offending or anti-social behaviour.

Typically the aim of these programmes is to improve participants' self esteem, improve social and/or life skills, address the reasons for engaging in offending behaviour, or to provide an alternative to boredom and other less desirable activities.

Evaluations of these programmes show that outcomes vary. The success of these interventions depends on the mix of programme components and aftercare that is provided. This Tip Sheet summarises the results of relevant evaluations and lists good practice components that assist in designing projects that are more likely to deliver positive outcomes for young people.

### What are adventure-based, residential programmes for at-risk youth and young offenders?

- Adventure-based programmes for youth vary in terms of setting, types of activities and therapeutic goals.
- Wilderness programmes are usually conducted in a location away from the participants' usual community in some kind of remote location.
- Adventure programmes may include physical activities such as rock climbing with therapeutic programme components. These can be either residential programmes or day programmes that do not remove the participants from their usual place of residence.

### What is the evidence base for using adventure-based, residential programmes with at-risk youth and young offenders?

Numerous evaluation studies indicate that residential programmes are less effective with young people than programmes that are run on a day attendance basis (McLaren 2000). Wilderness/adventure initiatives have a neutral to slightly positive impact on recidivism rates (McLaren 2000). When outcomes from these programmes are negative it is often argued that this is because bringing young people together who exhibit anti-social behaviour may normalise this behaviour amongst the group.

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Findings from a review of the crime prevention effect of wilderness challenge programmes with delinquent youth, found the recidivism rate was eight percent lower for programme participants (29%) than for control subjects (37%). In particular they found that established programmes were more effective, indicating the need for ongoing core funding to assist programmes to be more effective (Wilson and Lipsey 2000).

### Boot camps

Some people promote militaristic style 'boot camps' as a corrections style programme for use with young offenders. Such camps are structured along the lines of military style training and have an 'intuitive appeal' as juvenile offenders are often thought to lack discipline (Wilson & MacKenzie 2006). However, the review of well evaluated boot camps, using recidivism as the measure of success, showed no overall positive effect from the military type aspects of these programmes (Wilson & MacKenzie 2006). This review found that camps might be more effective if the primary emphasis is therapeutic rather than militaristic and physical. Other reviews agree that it is the therapeutic elements of such programmes that are crucial to success (AIC 2003; Wilson & Lipsey 2000).

Intensive regimes such as boot camps are unlikely to be effective in reducing recidivism unless they also contain a therapeutic component and taught skills that the young person could generalise to their regular social environment (AIC 2003). This literature highlights how adventure-based, residential programmes can increase the effectiveness in working with at-risk youth and/or young offenders through the inclusion of additional components in their programme structure.

### If youth programmes are going to incorporate adventure style activities or use a militaristic discipline style the following good practice elements in the design and implementation may lead to a more successful programme

Key programme components that are associated with successful outcomes for participants in adventure or wilderness programmes include:

- assessment and ongoing monitoring of participants
- appropriately trained and qualified staff
- screening of programme staff
- a risk management assessment of activities

- ensuring that programme components are age appropriate and that the age range of participants is clearly specified
- multi-modal treatments with a cognitive-behavioural orientation (Lipsey & Wilson 1998; Singh & White 2000)
- that specific criminogenic needs are addressed, eg, attitudes supporting offending, peer groups, family problems, drug and alcohol use, anger and violence problems (Singh & White 2000, Zampese 1998). An example of this is teaching young people interpersonal and problem-solving skills.
- meaningful and substantial contact between participants and treatment personnel
- an aftercare programme (AIC 2003)
- it is recommended that programmes for Indigenous or culturally and linguistically diverse youth engage significant others, are culturally appropriate, and employ people who relate well with the clients (Singh & White 2000)
- if a juvenile was 13 years or less and considered high risk, parent training and support in areas including parenting skills were found to be effective (Sherman et al. 1998).

### Program characteristics

A number of programme characteristics have been identified that could lead to enhanced efficacy of residential-based interventions (Lipsey and Wilson 1998). These findings while not exclusively from the literature on adventure-based residential programmes are applicable as they highlight conditions in which residential programmes can succeed in working with young offenders. These findings are:

- *Broad programme characteristics:* The most successful outcomes are attained from residential programmes that:
  - are staffed by personnel trained in mental health techniques (such as behavioural and cognitive-behavioural techniques) (Lipsey & Wilson 1998)
  - allow for meaningful and substantial contact between the participants and the treatment personnel (Sherman et al. 1998).
- *Program length:* Programs that have been running for two years or longer were more effective (Lipsey & Wilson 1998). This highlights the need for ongoing core funding to allow programmes to become established.

### Treatment

- The use of multi-modal treatments with a cognitive-behavioural orientation has been found to be particularly effective for working with young offenders. Treatment types that have been found to be particularly effective include:
  - Interpersonal skills training, including social skills such as assertive communication, and perspective taking (Lipsey & Wilson 1998; McLaren 2000).
  - The use of behaviour modification techniques. These techniques involve outlining expected standards of behaviour and the rewards and sanctions associated with them (Sherman et al. 1998).
  - Cognitive-behavioural techniques, including role modelling by staff, role plays, video feedback, social reinforcement, systematic desensitisation and cognitive reappraisal (Lipsey & Wilson 1998; McLaren 2000).
  - Teaching family homes, in which trained staff use behavioural techniques to teach skills during weekday residence (Lipsey & Wilson 1998; McLaren 2000).
  - Residential drug treatment using a therapeutic community approach (McLaren 2000).
  - Relapse prevention planning, including identifying life circumstances that put young people at risk of re-offending, and planning how to deal with them (McLaren 2000).

### Aftercare

- The literature indicates that when a young person returns to their normal social environment and there is no provision of aftercare, short-term positive gains made during a programme may be rendered ineffective (AIC 2003; Singh & White 2000).
- General elements of aftercare programmes include:
  - Progressively increased responsibility and freedom.
  - Facilitation of the youth's interaction and involvement with the community.
  - Developing new resources, support structures and opportunities for the youth.
  - Monitoring the youth's progress. (Source: Altschuler & Armstrong 1999: 4; cited in Singh & White 2000)

### What factors will enhance the likelihood of conducting a successful adventure-based residential programme with at-risk Indigenous youth and Indigenous youth who have offended?

The following characteristics are particularly important in programmes that aim to reduce offending in Indigenous and ethnic minority groups (Singh and White 2000).

- A comprehensive approach which utilises different strategies.
- The involvement of significant others in the young person's life, for example family and community.
- Ensuring staff are sensitive, culturally appropriate and that the young people can identify with them.
- Ensuring the inclusion of culturally appropriate material.

### References and further reading

All URLs were correct at 17 April 2007.

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