

Youth on Track

Factsheet

What is Youth on Track?

Youth on Track is an early intervention scheme for 10-17-year olds that identifies and responds to young people at risk of long-term involvement in the criminal justice system.

The Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) funds non-government organisations to engage eligible young people and their families in case management and to provide evidence-informed interventions that respond to a young person's identified offending related risks and needs.

Key principles of Youth on Track

Intervening earlier to divert young people from the criminal justice system

Separating treatment from punishment

Responding to risk and need rather than simply to crime

Responding promptly to enable a response to an immediate problem

How does the scheme work?

Youth on Track provides NSW Police and other eligible agencies with an opportunity to refer young people, known to be at medium to high-risk of re-offending, to a support service without requiring a legal mandate. The young person's engagement in Youth on Track is voluntary.

Youth on Track has six key stages:

1. Referral and screening
2. Engagement
3. Assessment
4. Case Management
5. Intervention
6. Exit planning

NSW Police and other eligible agencies refer young people to Youth on Track when the young person has a range of criminogenic risk factors and has received at least one formal police contact. Referral agencies can include:

- NSW Police
- Education
- Youth Justice NSW
- Justice Health and Forensic Mental Health
- Solicitors
- DCJ – Community Services
- NSW Health – Community Health
- Out of Home Care Providers
- Family Referral Service
- Headspace and other mental health services

Young people who receive their second formal police contact are automatically screened to assess their eligibility for the scheme. This screening is completed by the Youth on Track Screening Officer based at NSW Police.

Once the young person has been screened and referred, the Youth on Track service provider conducts a comprehensive assessment of the young person's needs relating to their offending.

The Youth on Track case manager develops a case plan with each young person and their family that focuses on addressing the young person's individual risks and needs as identified through assessment tools.

Youth on Track case management is a combined direct service case management and coordination model that focuses on criminogenic needs. This combined model requires Youth on Track case managers to coordinate service delivery, facilitate access to supports, and deliver offence-focused behaviour and family interventions.

The Youth on Track service provider provides casework and interventions following the principles of risks, needs and responsibility.

Improved support for youth at risk

Prior to Youth on Track, the criminal justice system diverted some young offenders out of the system using cautions and youth justice conferences but did not provide intensive offence-focused case management and interventions until they received a supervised order with Youth Justice. This often occurs after the young person has had several formal contacts with police.

Youth on Track offers a service to address criminogenic risk and needs as early as the first formal contact with police for young people who have a greater likelihood of re-offending.

Youth on Track complements the existing criminal justice system by operating alongside and after formal contact with the system.

The need for Youth on Track

Many young people who offend and receive a caution will stop without any form of intervention and without further contact with the criminal justice system.

However, young people who come into the criminal justice system at a young age are more likely to offend for a longer time, more frequently and go on to receive a custodial sentence.

Youth on Track focuses on intervening early, engaging families and providing targeted, individualised interventions to address the underlying causes of the young person's involvement in crime.

Participant profile

Youth on Track targets 10 – 17-year-old offenders who have a high likelihood of re-offending. These young people have received one or more cautions, conferences or charges and are likely to also have other risk factors.

The target group has not yet received a supervised order with Youth Justice however, based on an actuarial screening tool developed by the Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (BOCSAR), has a greater chance of re-offending.

Using data from BOCSAR, it is predicted that approximately 1900 young people per year are in the Youth on Track target group in NSW.

Some demographic details of the target group:

- 80% male
- 70% identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander
- 46% had first involvement in the criminal justice system before the age of 14

Of relevance is the very high proportion of young Aboriginal people in the target group.

Youth on Track locations

The Department of Communities and Justice has funded the scheme in Blacktown, Hunter and the Mid North Coast sites since 2013 then added the Central West, New England, and Coffs Clarence sites in December 2016 and Riverina in July 2019.

Outcomes from Youth on Track

The scheme shows promising results with 75% of participants reducing or stabilising contact with police after involvement with Youth on Track and 63% reducing their offending risk after just three months on the scheme.

100% of participants initially assessed as high or medium high reduce their risk of reoffending at program completion.

Most participants who completed had improvements in family functioning, behaviour, and engagement with school or employment.

Evaluating the scheme

The Cultural Indigenous Research Centre Australia (CIRCA) completed a social outcome evaluation in April 2017. BOCSAR are conducting a randomised controlled trial (RCT) to assess re-offending. BOCSAR will report on the results by late-2021 to inform funding decisions for state-wide expansion. BOCSAR also completed a Process Evaluation to review whether the RCT is being implemented as intended.

Whole of government approach

Youth on Track has the benefit of multi-agency support. It aims to work collaboratively with other service providers to ensure consistent service provision without duplication of service.

For more information visit the website at:
www.youthontrack.justice.nsw.gov.au