

voices in

youth justice

Findings from recent research into youth justice

Lisa Newick

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# zileh

boot camps

*nothing works*

*lock 'em up & throw away the key...*

media

Police and justice system

criminologists

academics

youth justice workers

Young people

Multiple Voices in Youth Justice

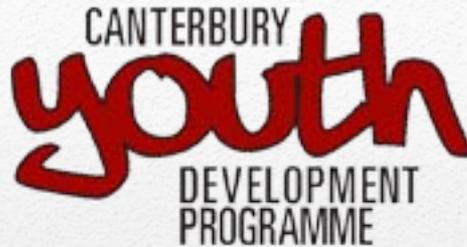
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# Findings from a research project with the Canterbury Youth Development Programme

1. Analysis of criminal records of past participants
2. Interviews with past participants
3. Interviews with youth justice workers

## Today's focus...

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- Established in Christchurch in 2008
- Community-based youth justice services
- Young men aged 14-18 on Youth Court Orders
- Supervision with Activity (SwA)
- Assessed as medium/high risk of reoffending
  
- Address complex and diverse needs of these youth
- CYF refers and funds each young person
- Most referrals made to the Mana programme

# About the CYDP...

## Mana 2010- current

- 6 months intensive supervision
- Individualised intake
- Multi-modal & holistic
- Training & work experience
- Case management system
- On-going mentoring & support

About the CYDP Mana programme

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# Research: Stage #1

## Evaluation of criminal records of participants

Quantitative analysis on measures of reoffending including:

- Seriousness, Type, Frequency and Length of time

Methodology:

- Retrospective and longitudinal
- Quasi-experimental with a matched comparison group
  - Replicated NZ research, matched on age, gender, Youth Court Orders, type and seriousness.

When measured against the comparison group:

The not-so-good news...

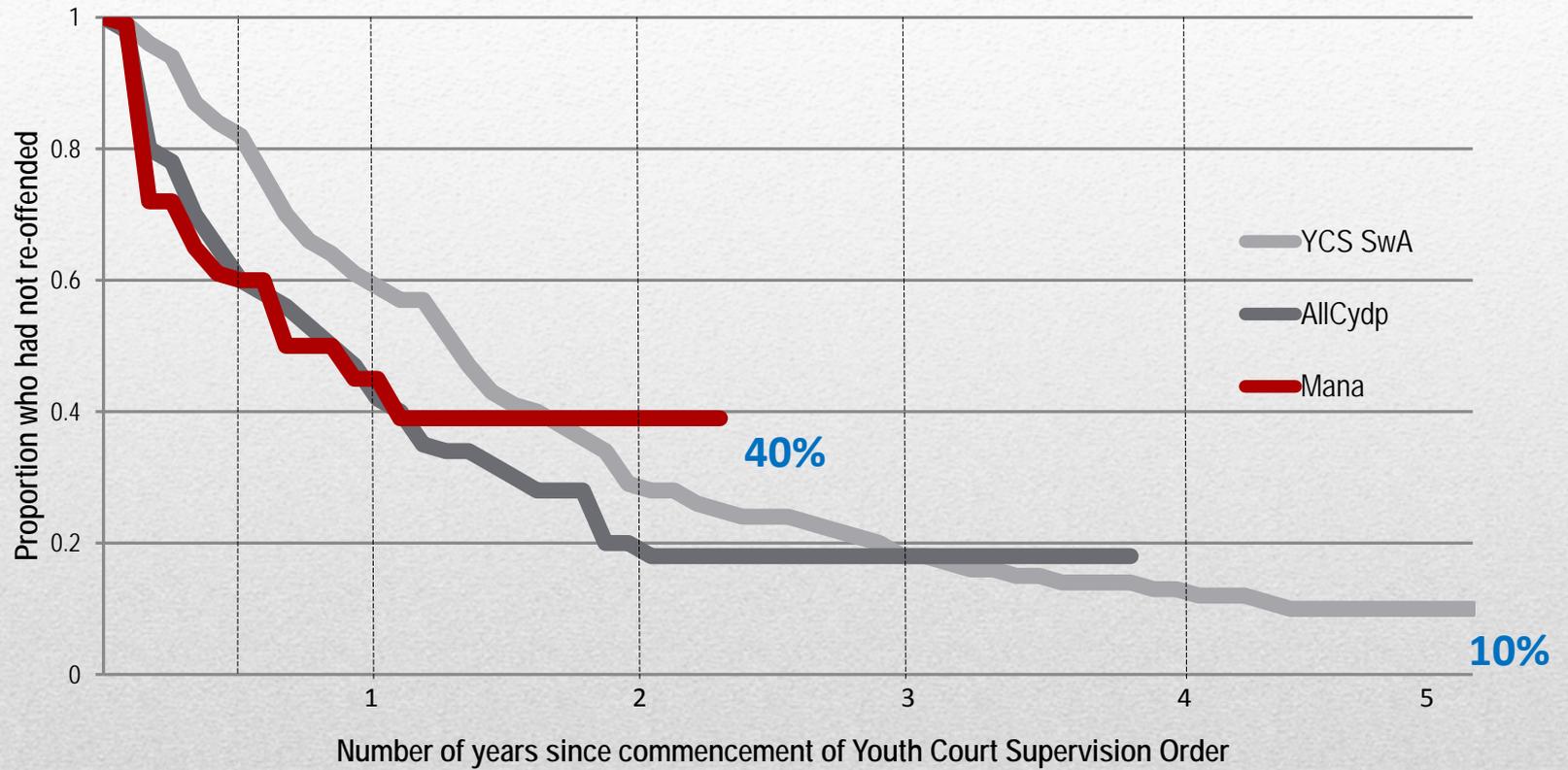
- CYDP group reoffended twice as fast in the first six months
- CYDP group reoffended twice as much

But the good news was....

- Mana sample had no new reoffenders three years earlier than the comparison group
- Mana sample had a greater percentage of desisters
- Mana sample displayed a 21% reduction in violent reoffending

Findings from Stage #1

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## Length of time to reoffend



But what do the stats mean?

## unheard voices in youth justice

"in perhaps no other area of human endeavour would we so consistently and so confidently *ignore* the opinions of those on the receiving end of social action". Lane *et al* (2002, p. 431)

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# Research: Stage #2

## The perspectives of past participants

Qualitative interviews with ten past participants

- Exploring youth experiences of youth justice
- Exploring personal stories of desistance, or not
- Both in the context of the CYDP

Participants

- Recruited for diversity
- Positioned as experts and valued research partners



# identity

## Multiple identities

Rebels and victims

## Changing identities

Workers and warriors

Identity change = desistance

Desistance as a journey of change

going straight and staying straight

It really takes balls to do this – to change. Vinnie

I never really listened until one day I just decided “Fuck it, I’m not keen to do this anymore.” I was getting to the stage, where if I keep fucking up, I’m going to jail. I didn’t want to. I knew if I eventually ended up doing this, I’d be taken out of hand, I’d lose the plot. I would do something I would regret.

Ben

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Accepting the challenge to change

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Gang colours. Yeah, I stopped wearing them. I used to wear them all the time. You're just looking for trouble if you wear too much colours. It felt better.

Tama

That was really the turning point for my crime, when I changed, when I found my roots, found my culture. I realised that I don't need be like "stuff you bro" to be a warrior. That the real warrior is out there on the battlefield, you know?

Wiremu

A sense of belonging

It's really easy for me to make a mistake, if you know what I mean. If I just have a couple of drinks, I'll be really easily influenced. So I have to remove all – and any - temptation out of my way. Otherwise, you know, there's that chance. And if I don't get that chance, it doesn't happen.

Daniel

To be honest with you, I wasn't in the mood to change my life. They were hard-out trying to help me.

But after the course I went to jail, and Lee-Anne was still there for me. She came and visited me in jail, and she was helping me – “We'll always be there for you” – even though she didn't need to and I wasn't on the course no more.

It just made me realise that people were still there for me to change my life.

Liam



- Valuable feedback for the CYDP
- Identity as a focus in youth justice
  - Identity as a yj desistance factor
  - Time pressures

- find someone to love
- something to do
- something to hope for
- a place to call home

Maxwell and Marsh 2010

- someone to become

What do these findings mean?

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# Research: Stage #3

Gain information on effective practice in youth justice

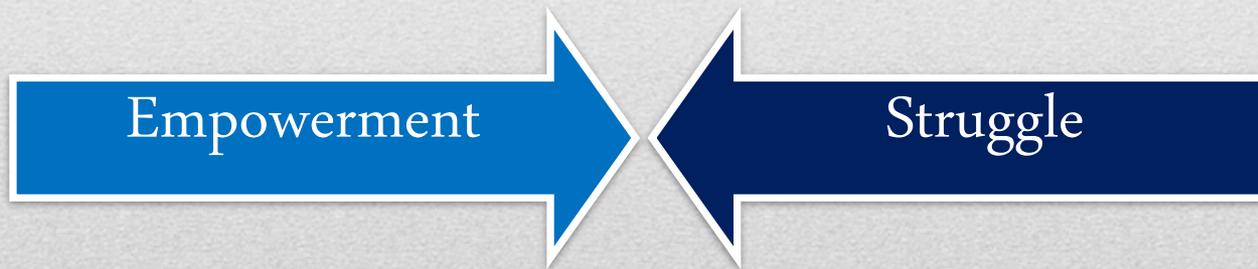
Voices of YJ workers under-represented in the literature

Qualitative interviews with youth justice agency managers, towards an information sharing project

Explored what they regarded as effective practice with youth who reoffend to aid desistance.

Critical discourse analysis

1. The importance of building quality relationships with youth
2. Staff skills to build those relationships
3. Staff recruitment and retention
4. Innovative practice to strengthen youth engagement
5. Continued advocacy – ‘not giving up’



Findings from Stage #3

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The only thing that can turn these kids around  
is the actual belief that someone  
cares a damn about them Neville

Our organisation is at the end of the road.

Sadly school can't be bothered, courses don't want to know, parents  
are at the end of their tether, CYF aren't sure what to do anymore, so  
they are here Anni

The importance of building youth relationships

engagement  
communication  
accountability  
professional judgement...

compassion  
consistency  
reliability  
flexibility...

The stakes are too high for these boys. We have to have the best staff we can. If you can't commit and just want to do a 9 to 5 job and are not available at nights and weekends, and you are not on fire for a young person, then we are not going to hire you.

Mike

Staff skills & characteristics to build relationships



Programme modules

Social media

The organising of staff

The kids who come here have been told all their lives that they're  
useless and they'll fail.

We try and turn that around, and reward and celebrate every  
achievement, which can motivate them to go on and do  
something else Neville

Innovation to strengthen youth engagement

1. CYDP was achieving high desistance numbers but how/why?
2. Youth voices revealed desistance linked to changed identity and the support of the CYDP to...
  - Accept the challenge to change
  - Enable a sense of belonging
  - Sustain long-term change or 'staying straight'
3. Youth workers voices highlighted the importance of long-term relationships & creative practice with youth to support change
  - Empowerment = Struggle

## To sum up the research...

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# Zilch no more!

- The importance of valuing and seeking out the usually unheard but expert voices in YJ
- They offer unique and meaningful perspectives on the desistance process.
- These voices provide depth and detail to the surface data of statistics
- Highlight the positive work and continual struggle within youth justice
- Thank you for your time! Questions welcome

*Huge thanks to...*

*Past CYDP clients*

*SwA agency participants*

*And from the CYDP....*

*Dr Mike Field*

*Mrs Lee-Anne Savea*

*Sgt. Bevan Seal*